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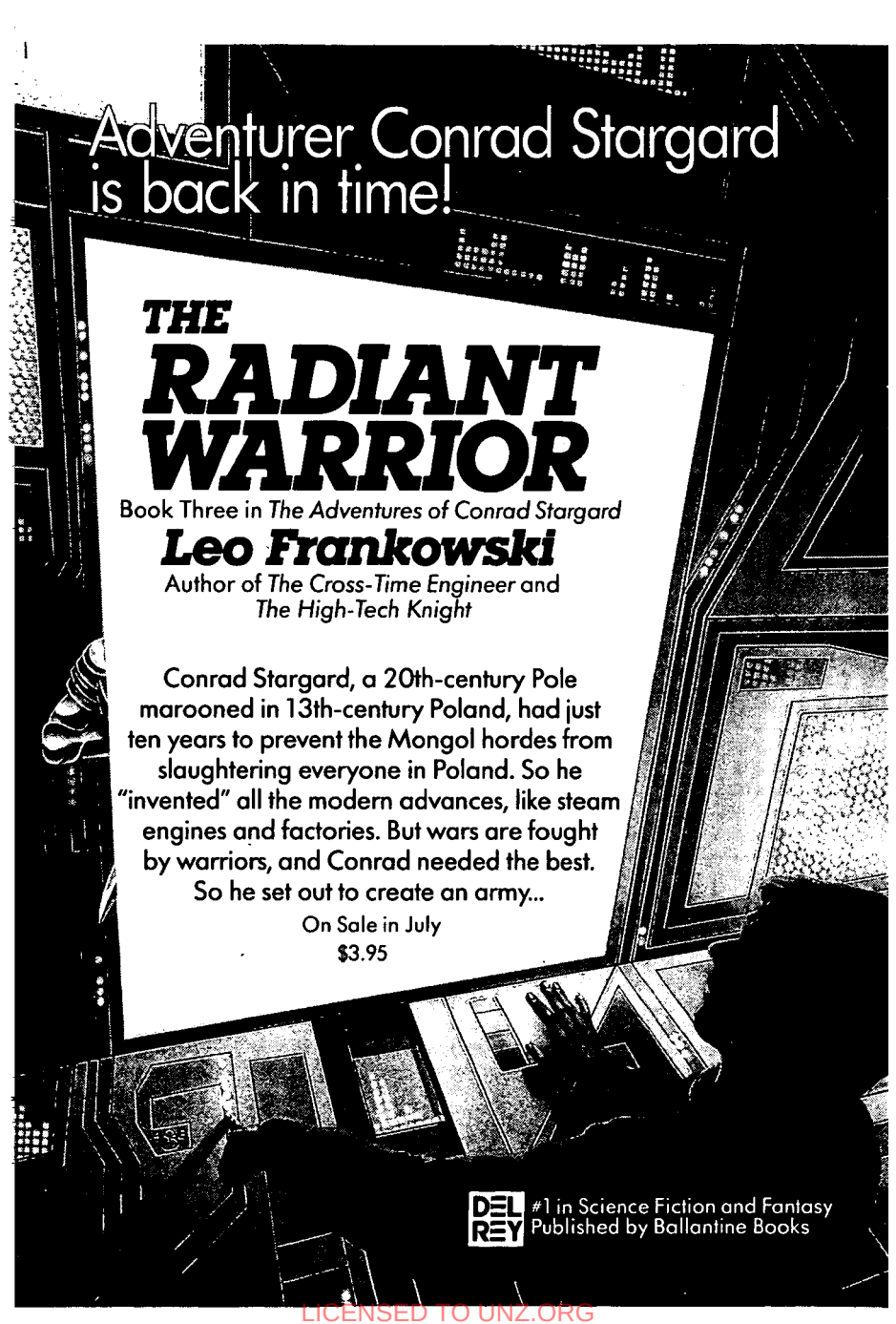
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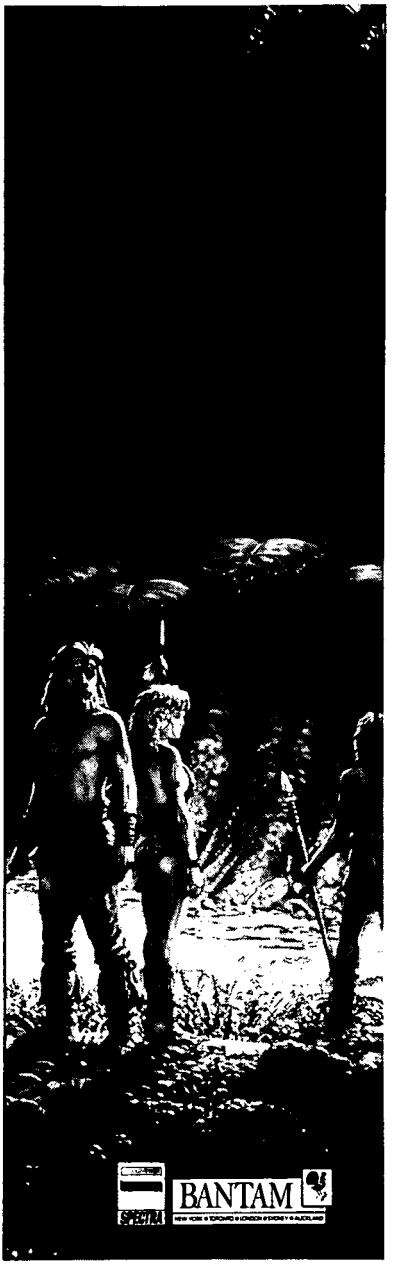

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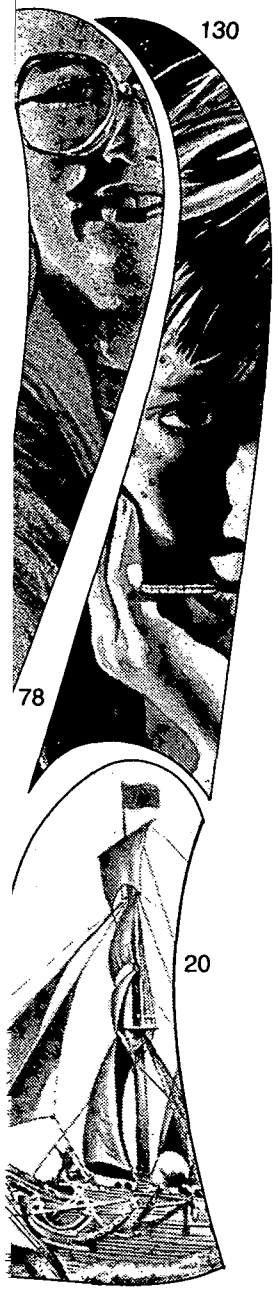

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

PREDICTION

There is a general myth among laymen that, somehow, the chief function of a science fiction writer is to make predictions that eventually come true.

Thus, I am frequently asked, "How does it feel to see all the predictions you have made coming true?"

To which I can only reply, "It feels great—in those very few cases in which something I have said actually came to pass."

At other times, I am asked with utter confidence, "Can you give us a few of your predictions that have come true?"

I would love to be able to say, "Well, to name just a few: airplanes, radios, television, skyscrapers, and, in my early days, the wheel and fire."

But I can't bring myself to do that. The interviewers might actually print it, and they might try to give me a medal for predicting fire.

However, I came across a prediction I made once that I didn't know I had made—that actually I didn't know was a prediction. Nor did I discover it myself. Someone pointed it out to me.

In order to explain this, I'll have to take the long way round. Please bear with me.

Back in 1952, I began to write a novel called *The Caves of Steel*. It was finished in 1953, was published in the October, November, and December, 1953, issues of *Galaxy* as a three-part serial, and was published in book form by Doubleday in 1954.

It was a science fiction murder mystery that introduced my characters, Elijah Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw, whom some of you may have come across in your reading. Toward the end of *The Caves of Steel*, I needed a second murder for the sake of the plot, and that bothered me, for I don't like murders and I rarely have them in my mysteries. When I do, there is only one and it is committed off-stage, usually before the story begins. (I'm funny that way.)

The first murder in *The Caves of Steel* had been off-stage before the story began, and the second murder would be off-stage, also, but I didn't want to kill a human being, so, instead, I killed a rather simple robot. But, again, I didn't want to kill him brutally by smashing in

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his cranium or throwing him into a vat of melted lead. I preferred something more science fictional.

So here is a character in the story, a Dr. Gerrigel, describing the dead robot:

" 'In the robot's partly clenched right fist,' said Dr. Gerrigel, 'was a shiny ovoid about two inches long and half an inch wide with a mica window at one end. The fist was in contact with his skull as though the robot's last act had been to touch his head. The thing he was holding was an alpha-sprayer. You know what they are, I suppose?' "

The nature of the alpha-sprayer was then explained for the sake of the reader. It was described as a device that sends out a beam of alpha particles through the mica window. The impingement of the alpha particles on the robot's positronic brain was drastic. Or, as I put it: "Dr. Gerrigel said, 'Yes, and his positronic brain paths were immediately randomized. Instant death, so to speak.' "

Well, why not? Alpha particles are capable of knocking electrons out of atoms. It is because they do so, leaving electrically charged ions behind, that it was discovered, in 1911, that they could be detected in cloud-chambers. The ions, with their electric charge, served as nuclei for tiny water-droplets and those droplets marked out the path of the particle.

Positrons, which I use in robotic brain-paths in order to make them sound science fictional, are precisely like electrons except for pos-

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sessing a positive charge rather than a negative one. Alpha particles should shove them out of the way with equal ease, and if positrons make up the brain paths, shoving them away disrupts the brain paths and inactivates the robots.

There's nothing ingenious about it at all. Perfectly humdrum.

And then a short time ago, I received a letter from a gentleman working with a corporation that deals with computers. It begins as follows:

"This letter is to inform you and congratulate you on another remarkable scientific prediction of the future; namely your foreseeing of the dynamic random-access memory (DRAM) logic upset problem caused by alpha particle emission, first observed in 1977, but written about by you in *Caves of Steel* in 1957." [*Note*: Actually, 1952.]

Apparently the corporation tracked down failures in memory devices and finally decided that "These failures are caused by trace amounts of radioactive elements present in the packaging material used to encapsulate the silicon devices which, upon radioactive decay, emit high energy alpha particles that upset the logic states of the semiconductor memory. . . .

"I am writing you about this topic because in your book, *Caves of Steel*, published in the 1950s, you use an alpha particle emitter to 'murder' one of the robots in the story, by destroying ('randomizing') its positronic brain. This is, of course, as good a way of describing a logic upset as any I've heard.

"I get a great big kick out of finding out that our millions of dollars of research, culminating in several international awards for most important scientific contribution in the field of reliability of semiconductor devices in 1978 and 1979, was predicted in substantially accurate form twenty years [*Note*: Twenty-five years, actually] before the events took place! You may certainly with great pride add this phenomenon to your collection of scientific predictions."

Well, you can easily imagine that I was delighted, but truth is mighty and will prevail. I instantly wrote to the gentleman who was so pleased at my prediction that I honestly was not aware that I was making a prediction, and that the whole thing was a tribute, not to my ingenuity, but to the good luck that constantly dogs my footsteps.

A much more intuitive and remarkable prediction was made by the science fictional father of us all, H. G. Wells. First, a little background.

In 1913, the British chemist, Frederick Soddy (1877-1956), advanced the "isotope concept" based on his studies of the elements produced in the course of radioactive decay. He proposed that a particular element might be made up of atoms identical in chemical properties but differing somewhat in atomic weight. Elements, then, in-

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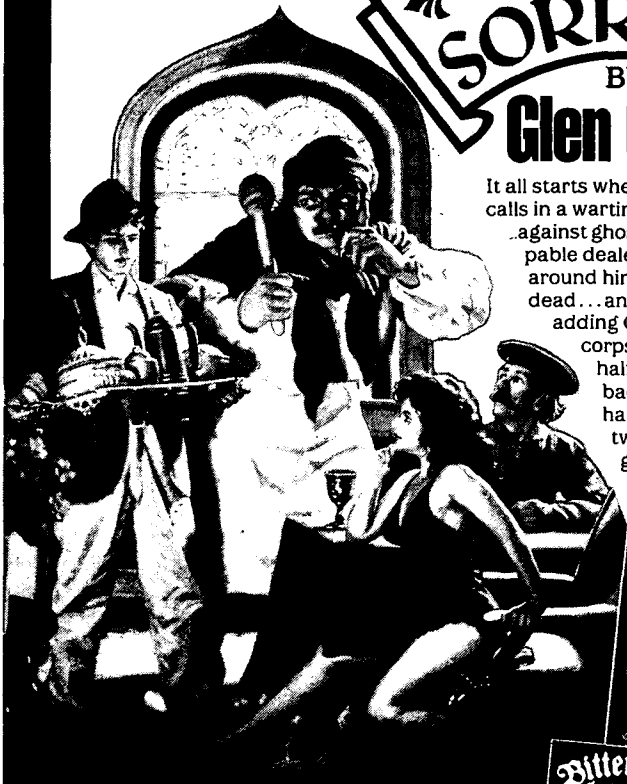
Glen Cook



It all starts when Garrett's old sergeant calls in a wartime debt. This time he's up against ghosts, ghouls—and an unstoppable dealer in death. Everyone around him seems to be ending up dead... and they've just missed adding Garrett to this corps of corpses. With the toughest half-elf around to guard his back, Garrett has to get his hands on the killer—while two invisible beauties try to get their hands on him!

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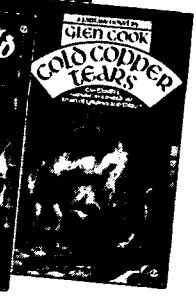

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stead of necessarily being made up of absolutely identical elements were actually mixtures of several almost identical "isotopes" differing in atomic weight.

This made so much sense, it was quickly accepted and has remained a cornerstone of chemistry and of atomic physics ever since.

But just the other day, I received a reprint of a paper by H. G. Wells, written on September 5, 1896 (seventeen years *before* Soddy's suggestion), in which he refers to some work done by a chemist the previous year, before radioactivity had even been discovered, and suggests that to explain that work, it is possible to suppose that "there are two kinds of oxygen, one with an atom a little heavier than the other." By saying that, he is anticipating and predicting the existence of isotopes.

Furthermore, he points out that "the electric spark traversing the gas has a . . . selective action. Your heavier atoms or molecules get driven this or that way with slightly more force." This is a pretty good description of a phenomenon first noted by the British physicist, Joseph John Thomson (1856-1940), in 1912, sixteen years after Wells's suggestion.

How's that!

Naturally, I would like to point to something of my own that contained a bit of nice intuitive insight, and here it is. In 1966, I wrote a scientific essay, "I'm Looking Over a Four-Leaf Clover," which eventually appeared in the September 1966 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.*

In it I wanted to speculate about the origin of the universe and I was anxious to rebut the favorite comment of some who would ask, "If the universe started as a 'cosmic egg,' where did the cosmic egg come from?" The hope was that if I were faced with that question I would have to admit the existence of a supernatural agency of creation.

I therefore postulated the existence of "negative energy" and supposed that energy was created in both negative and positive form so that there was no *net* creation. I went on to advance what I called "Asimov's Cosmogonic Principle" and wrote, "The most economical way of expressing the principle is 'In the Beginning, there was Nothing.' "

Well, some ten years later, the theory of the "inflationary universe" was advanced. It was altogether different from anything I had suggested, but in one respect it was identical. The universe was pictured as starting as a quantum fluctuation in a vacuum, so that "In the Beginning, there was Nothing."

That piece of insight I am really proud of. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I have just received the November 1988 issue of *IAsfm* and over the last several issues I have read some letters about the *I, Robot* screenplay by Harlan Ellison. In this issue, there were three letter-writers who gushed with praise of the screenplay. I myself don't want to sound like a wet blanket who feels compelled to put everything down, but I believe that this screenplay deserves some criticism. It does have some serious flaws, and if I were to produce this screenplay into a movie, I would definitely make some major changes.

One flaw in question is where, in Scene 216, reporter Robert Bratenahl notices that in forty years of being the First President of the Galactic Federation, Stephen Byerley has shown no signs of aging. Bratenahl's conclusion: "The sonofabitch was *immortal*!" Once I read that, I knew instantly that Byerley was a robot. It was obvious. It was *too* obvious. It also prematurely quashed the tension that kept me eagerly interested in the next part of the story. When I came to the end of Part One, I was eagerly waiting for Part Two, wondering what was going to come next. But at the end of Part Two, I knew.

Another thing I disliked is the idiot plot revealed in that scene. If we, the audience, had any knowledge that Byerley never aged, we would have guessed all too quickly that Byerley was a robot. The story would have been better if some less obvious clue were revealed. And you'd think that it would be possible to make Byerley *appear* to age, through makeup or a series of redesigned robot bodies. Why wouldn't a genius like Susan Calvin think of *that?*

The worst part, though, is where Susan Calvin says that the rumor that she and Byerley were lovers kept the news web from finding out the truth about Byerley. Over a period of forty years? Fat chance. In that time period, *someone* would have found out that Byerley was a robot, no matter what efforts were taken to keep that fact from view. Having taken a mass media course in college, I learned that the press knows a lot about the government that it doesn't reveal to the public in the interest of national security (such as secret military missions, etc.). A more realistic story would be where the news web knows that Byerley is a machine, but Calvin convinces them to keep that fact secret.

In Scene 317, it seems as if the public finds out the truth anyway.

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Then the story ends. That's it? No scandal? No public outrage? Byerley may have ended the Four Worlds War, but does that mean the public will be forgiving about being fooled for the past forty years? I doubt it.

Well, I mention these faults because they're going to crop up when professional movie critics review the movie, and the moviegoing public might not take kindly to the movie if it has too many major flaws. I don't consider this a bad movie script, but it's not one of the great lost masterpieces of all time. Maybe this will make Harlan Ellison feel better. Or maybe he'll hate me. My basic point is that a good movie could be made from this script were some of these flaws corrected. True, many movies have a certain amount of corn or hokiness, but the memorable ones have little or none.

Sincerely,

Thomas Q. Radigan.
Riverside, IL

PS: Great magazine you've got, so keep going.

None of the points you make refer back to anything in my own version of the I, Robot *stories. That means it's you and Harlan all alone together. Do you mind if I cover my ears?*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I read Mr. Spinrad's November column with great interest. Although there are a multitude of SF/fantasy books on the market, I find very few are really good or appealing. There seem to be three general categories: Romance in the guise of fantasy, War in the guise of Celtic fantasy, and End of civilization as we know it/"cyberpunk" in the guise of social science fiction.

There are very few books these days on meeting and adapting to otherworld cultures (such as *Pride of Chanur* or *The Architect of Sleep*), political intrigue (such as the "Amber" series or *Bio of a Space Tyrant*), or even "modern magic" versus "old magic" (*Elf Defense* and *Silicon Mage* come to mind here). It is almost as if imagination has been stifled!

I've read several books through, to no avail, with the hope that the plots and storylines would get better. I feel gypped and very angry because I've been ripped off. I have often felt I can do better. Perhaps Mr. Spinrad is right. New writers are put through so much hassle that they no longer want to put up with the bureaucratic maze to get published.

So, what is the solution to this problem? (If it is perceived as a problem in today's society.) If a program was initiated to recruit, encourage, and support new writers, I believe imaginative and excellent stories would be developed. But this encouragement and support is definitely needed.

On to my next subject. Where are Blacks in the future? In fact, where are minorities *anywhere* in the realm of science fiction/fantasy? I can count on two hands the number of SF stories where the main character was a minority in Fantasy, forget it! No non-whites need apply. I feel that writers, especially fantasy writers, have to take a look at other members of the human race and recognize that *We* are

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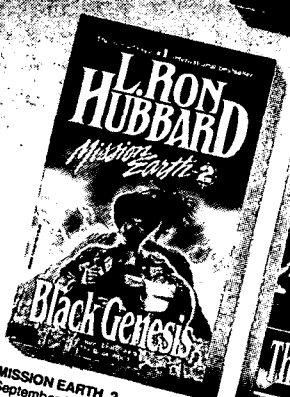

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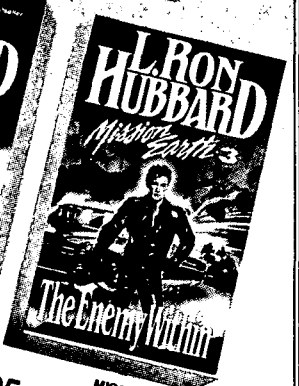

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here, too! *We* are also part of civilization. There are plenty of folktales by minorities that can be incorporated into modern day efforts of fantasy and science fiction.

I know that there are few Black and other minority science fiction writers—but are they the only ones qualified to write a minority into a story? Come on, folks, let's stop this subtle racism or self-imposed segregation.

Best Regards,

Wanda M. Haight
San Francisco, CA

You'll have to take my word for it that Asimov's *does everything possible to recruit, encourage and support new writers. We don't do it because we're so noble and kind-hearted. We do it because we want to survive.* But *the new writers have to write* well*; we can't accept something just because the writer is new and for no other reason. As for minorities, I'm with you, but a writer can only write about what he (or she) knows. In my stories, you'll find no blue-collar workers, no jocks, no homosexuals, no alcoholics. Why? Because I have no experience with any of them. All my characters are academic types. It's all I know. I imagine other writers have similar problems.*

—Isaac Asimov

My Dear Sir:

Having been a fan for many years, I am happy to say that I see great things in the science fiction field emerging. Recently I attended a conference at Illinois State University which was hosted by a college professor of mine—Steven Kagle—and featured Gary Wolfe and Timothy Zahn. It was quite interesting indeed. Kagle invited me to join this group for lunch and I enjoyed myself as I intently listened to the yarns the writers told. Zahn was so creative, I felt that perhaps his ability would rub off on me. It did not, however.

I teach English at Pontiac Township High School and have devised a science fiction program in my literature classes. Since these students are younger, I try not to overload them. Last year, I taught at Pleasant Plains Jr./Sr. High School in Pleasant Plains, Illinois, and introduced jr. high students to the field. I used "Helen O'Loy," "The Flying Machine," and "A Martian Odyssey," as well as "The Watery Place" and "The Immortal Bard."

Two weeks ago, a student from the past called and told me she had purchased "Nightfall" and *I, Robot*. She loved your writings and is considering entering your field. I consider it a success story when one of my students becomes interested in the literature I teach. She was one of many who enjoyed this genre of literature. When I listed the best American writers for my kids, I mentioned Bradbury, Heinlein, and yourself. Another English teacher said I was foolish because "everyone knows that science fiction is for boys who haven't had sex." I reminded this person that I was a boy, I have had sex, and I still enjoy science fiction. I also noted that she was single and asked her if she enjoyed romance to trash novels. She said nothing—I smiled. My future wife also enjoys science fiction but

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felt *I, Robot* was a bit long. Oh, well.

Sincerely,

Eric Sweetwood
Pontiac, IL

An interesting thought. What's wrong with pre-sex boys? Is a boy worthless until such time as he has had sex? Is it a disgrace to read anything that a pre-sex boy would read? I ask this because I started reading science fiction when I was nine and, as I recall, I had not yet experienced sex at that time.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Today I received the November 1988 issue of *IAsfm* and, as is my habit, I flipped immediately to the letters department. There I found one letter which disturbed me intensely, the one from Mr. McCracken in which he derides the idea of interstellar travel. He was, of course, referring to a story called "To Hell with the Stars," which appeared in an earlier issue. I was bothered by the story when I first read it, but much more so when I saw that it was being taken seriously by Mr. McCracken, by you, and, presumably, by many readers.

Well, what's wrong with the story? After all, everyone agrees that interstellar travel is insanely difficult. You yourself authored a speculative book in which you carefully examined the possibilities for interstellar travel. (If I remember right, the title was *Extraterrestrial Civilizations*.) Your conclusion was that interstellar travel is generally not worthwhile, and that communication by means of microwave transmissions should be much more practical.

Once again: What's wrong with the story? Just this: It assigns humanity an appalling lack of ingenuity in our attempts to reach the stars. To demonstrate this flaw, I have devised a cheap, efficient, and relatively fast method of interstellar travel which does not resort to FTL gibberish.

Before I get into the details, let me point out that I am hesitant to take credit for the idea, as it is based heavily on information I found in Eric Drexler's excellent book, *Engines of Creation*. Mr. Drexler describes molecular machines which, if given sufficiently detailed plans, could construct or reconstruct almost anything. This capability could lead to a breakdown of the distinction between communication and transportation. In other words, if we can send a detailed description of an object, the recipient will be able to accurately reconstruct the object.

Imagine a network of way stations, one in each inhabited stellar system. Each one would maintain microwave links with several other stations in nearby systems. Such a station would have facilities for analyzing a person's brain and recording the information from it. It would also sample the genetic code of the individual, take high-resolution pictures, and analyze any baggage or personal items. All of this information would be encoded and broadcast to the destination station. There the signal would be decoded, and the traveler reconstructed. The "translocation" of the individual would take place at the speed of light plus a few hours at

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either end for the nanomachines to do their work. To the traveler, no time seems to pass at all.

Obviously, there are some disadvantages to this type of travel, but none are overwhelming. First of all, there must be a station at the destination prepared to receive the broadcast and act upon it. These stations could be placed automatically by self-replicating probes launched from star to star by a combination of lightsails and laser batteries, as was briefly alluded to in *Engines of Creation*. In this way the galaxy could be ringed by way stations in a remarkably short period of time, probably well under a million years.

What about reliability? It would seem that a traveler is putting his life on the line by using the system. If something goes wrong at the receiving end, the signal could be lost forever. There are two ways of guarding against this type of accident. First we can keep a backup copy of the transmission at the originating station and hold it in safekeeping until an acknowledgement is received from the destination. Secondly, we can keep two stations in each stellar system, with one serving as a backup.

There are a few other problems (What happens if some unauthorized person intercepts your transmission?), but nothing that can't be worked out with a little effort. And if the speed of light doesn't seem fast enough for you, consider this: Mr. Drexler predicts that nanotechnology will allow humans to live extremely long lives. A short interstellar trip, by contrast, will take only a few years of objective time and no subjective time at all. Surely that is a small price to pay for the privilege of visiting alien worlds first-hand.

Sincerely,

Tony L. Belding
PO Box 512
Hamilton, TX 76531

Yes, this is a way (in theory) of traveling at precisely the speed of light, if you ignore the time it takes to analyze and record a brain. This means you can travel from here to the Andromeda galaxy in only the time (subjectively) that it takes you to analyze and record your brain, assuming a receiving station already exists in the Andromeda. But if you go there and then come back, 4.6 million years will have passed on Earth. That's a sort of disadvantage, isn't it?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I was very pleased to see that my previous letter, citing examples of science fiction predictions of live television coverage of the first manned moon landing, inspired Dennis Lien to uncover the earliest such example which he described in his own letter in the November 1988 issue. I was even more pleased to see that his letter inspired you to start a game of this sort and thus request the identity of the earliest science fiction story featuring interstellar travel. Well, I have the winning answer. The first interstellar travel story, "Mr. Foundation," was also the first galactic empire story.

In 1900, English author Robert W. Cole published his first novel. Entitled *The Struggle For Empire:*

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A Story Of The Year 2236, it was set in a utopian future when the British Empire has expanded into other star systems. Interstellar warfare then breaks out between Terra and a much superior alien race from the Sirius System. In its descriptions of space battles and of an Earth surrounded by a barrage of space torpedoes and orbital mines, while human scientists valiantly struggle to perfect the ultimate weapon, this novel is the equal of any of the stories of the Space Opera Era.

Sincerely yours,

Scott Jarrett
Lakeland, FL

I lose again. I have always thought that The Skylark of Space *by E.E. Smith, written in 1919 and published in 1928, was the first interstellar story, but obviously I'm wrong. And a galactic empire, too, under British auspices. But not an all-human galaxy, right?*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor Asimov:

I saw your comment about dinosaurs in an issue that I am currently reading. In my opinion, we are fortunate that they are extinct, as many of them were probably as dangerous as they were enormous. One camp person I met remarked that it would have been a pain in the butt to have to hide from tyrannosaurus and other meat eaters. I guess we would have had to have guns more powerful than elephant guns. I happen to be a dinosaur fan and possess some models of dinosaurs of almost every type. Just last night I had a dream that I went back in the time of early man in a time-machine. On this journey I killed a sabertooth tiger by shooting it with one of those ball-shooting guns. These tigers were said to be more powerful and formidable than ordinary tigers, so we are lucky *they* are extinct, too.

I thought of inquiring if you know an author named Lyman Frank Baum, author of *The Wizard of Oz* and its thirteen sequels. He is not well known now because a great many people have criticized his books, accusing him of going into racism. I brought this up because one of his characters, a copper clockwork man named Tik-Tok, was quite similar to a robot. In these books Tik-Tok is not considered a live thing because he can only operate while wound up, whereas when he runs down he is silent and motionless. He could not talk normally like the other characters in the books, but in monotonous jerky tones. Baum has written in two of his Oz books that Tik-Tok could only work in fairylands, while in civilized countries he was of no use. Baum also stated that mechanical people were more reliable than real people.

I think I should state that I have the talent to create clay images of robots. It so happens that I have one on a bookcase in the workroom of our house. I sell what I make out of clay. One time, while staying in Sands Point, New York, I managed to sell one robot to a woman who had a nephew who was a science fiction fan. About your phrase in *Robots and Empire* that Earthpeople hate and fear robots, I believe this is because they think they are

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weird and uncouth, somewhat like supernatural monsters.

I believe I've written enough comments. So good luck with your future and career.

Very truly yours,

Christopher Cook
Oxnard, CA

Believe it or not, I am familiar with Tik-Tok, and so is my dear wife, Janet, who is an ardent fan of the Oz books, not only by L. Frank Baum, but even more so by his successor, Ruth Plumly Thompson. Ballantine Books has recently put out new paperback editions of about a score of the Oz books.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I appreciate the frustration inherent in your reply to Steve Strode's letter, regarding the qualitative difference between the sound barrier and the limiting velocity of light (Letters, Nov. '88). People just seem to balk at the idea that the universe can be so willfully perverse: if you build a really *big* spaceship, they reason, and fire that baby up, why, you could shoot right past that nasty ol' light barrier. But it just doesn't seem to be that easy.

On the other hand . . . as I understand it, there's nothing in either theory of relativity that prohibits velocities *faster* than light; only velocities *equal* to light. Several very serious papers have been published in the scientific literature (theoretical studies, of course) concerning space/time at velocities greater than light. One concept, the possibility of tachyons — particles that can travel only at speeds greater than light—is taken more or less seriously by scientists. Gregory Benford turned this notion into one of the best hard-SF novels ever written (*Timescape*).

Let's assume you can go from velocities less than light to velocities greater than light without going through velocity equal to light (what the heck, electrons do something speciously analogous to this; a *real* SF writer should be able to come up with a plausible rationale for it). Even then Mr. Strode's dream might turn into a nightmare; the equations for space/time at velocities greater than light show some seriously strange stuff happening. I don't think any scientist would seriously propose a physical reality represented by those equations, but that's what SF writers are for!

So how come we keep getting the same old hyperspace-driven, transplanted Roman Empire-to-Galactic Empire stories? Intellectual laziness, I suppose, on the part of SF writers.

It seems to me there are two ways the hard-SF writer can go with this. One way: extrapolate, in a manner consistent with the theories of relativity, what space/time would be like for an observer at velocities greater than light. For instance—and I don't pretend to really understand this, I may be totally discombobulated—many of the space/time properties we observe at sublight velocities become inverted at superlight velocities, including time dilation. So imagine a captain getting in his ship and tooling up to 500c. To us, the Earthbound observers, the ship goes

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to Alpha Centauri and back in a few days. But there's nothing left of the captain but a pile of dust and bones. The ship's automatic systems are breaking down. The clocks show that a thousand years have passed on the ship.

I can think of only two stories that try to deal seriously, more or less, with this theme. "Common Time" by James Blish has time oscillating from slow to fast independent of the observer's consciousness, which is logically inconsistent but makes for a fascinating story. The character escapes into a "pseudodeath." "Escape," by the redoubtable Dr. A, has his characters undergo a "temporary death" while their ship is moving faster than light, since matter and energy as such can't exist under those conditions. It's interesting that both stories feature death and rebirth at velocities greater than light. ("Escape" is one of my favorite Asimov stories, incidentally.)

The other way to go with this is to simply accept the limiting velocity of light. Say goodbye to the stale old galactic empire and construct an interstellar civilization as it might really exist.

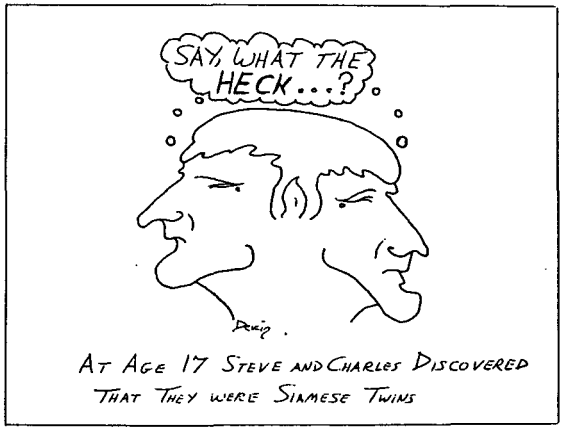
Or forget about galactic empires altogether: narrow your scope. Anderson's *Tau Zero* takes place almost entirely aboard one spaceship, has no galactic empires, yet still manages to encompass the death and re-birth of the universe.

The possibilities are endless—for SF writers willing to stop taking the easy way out.

Chris DeVito
Dix Hills, NY

First, don't get the idea that you're startling the science fiction world with your faster-than-light particles. I wrote a science essay on that in the December 1969 F&SF. *And while I can't speak for others, I can tell you that I use hyperspace not out of intellectual laziness but because that's not the point of my novels. Hyperspace is just a technique for keeping the story going. The points I deal with invariably involve* people.

—Isaac Asimov



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NEAT STUFF

by Matthew J. Costello

It's not easy for a modern person to admit to a superstition. Most of us blithely walk under ladders, stroll past black cats, and step on cracks all over the place.

But for the longest time I was intimidated by the great word processing revolution. I thought that there was only one way that *I* could write, and that was on yellow pads—stacks and stacks of them—that now fill my garage and attic like the mad scribbled testimony of the Count of Monte Cristo.

My theory was that all the hunting and pecking at a keyboard would interfere with the free flow of language. I'd lose my "voice," that special writer's style that I had come to love and cherish as my own. So I plodded along, struggling to decipher my scrawl, and dictating complete novels onto microcassettes, dutifully transcribed by a typing service.

But when my monthly transcription bills started nosing toward four figures I decided it was time to take the plunge.

And I spent months worrying about the quality of my word-processed prose. I still do, finding that the keyboard process encourages the construction of top-heavy sentences and grammatical *longuers*. But there was no doubt that the speed, the ease, and all the other well-publicized features of word processing out-weighed any stylistic qualms.

But then came the question of a printer. My transcription service supplied jet black, crisp, laser-printed pages. I muddled through with a sleepy dot matrix printer. And if there's one thing writers know, editors hate dot matrix submissions. The poor editors get bleary-eyed enough just from the weight of unsolicited articles and stories.

Recently we've seen a new generation of dot matrix printers featuring 24 pin printing that claim to offer letter quality work. And while that claim may be a bit of an overstatement, these printers do offer an acceptable alternative to the expense of a laser printer.

My first "printer" was actually a Brother Executron 70 typewriter, adapted with an interface. Like many typewriter companies, Brother has moved directly into the manufacture of printers. The Brother 1724 L (Brother International Corporation, 8 Corporate Place, Piscataway, NJ 08855-0159) is a fast printer that can handle everything from address labels to

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spread sheets. In its draft mode, it can spew forth twenty or thirty relatively decent-looking pages in a matter of minutes.

The letter quality of the Brother printer is remarkably good, with very little evidence that the clean, dark letters emerged from a dot matrix machine.

Even more impressive is the Panasonic KX-P1124 (Panasonic Industrial Company, Two Panasonic Way, Secaucus, NJ 07094). This is another fast machine—192 characters per second in its draft mode. But, unlike the Brother printer, the Panasonic machine does not require that you fiddle with internal DIP switches to set the emulation mode (IBM, Epson, etc.) of the machine. All instructions to the printer are found on the outside of the machine where you can select pica or elite, compressed, or elongated printing style. Having chewed up lots of sheets of fanfold paper, I found the Panasonic's paper feed wonderfully easy to set up.

Of course, the bottom line with any of these 24 pin printers is: how do they look?

And while they look light years removed from the little nine pin printers most of us started out with, the "letter-quality" look is still missing. For most purposes, including manuscripts, articles, and reports, these printers do an excellent job. But for those times that you want something that looks *really* typed, it will still be necessary to have a good electronic typewriter handy.

Electronic wonders never cease. . . . Recently, I spent two weeks with a new product that may revolutionize video—and lead to an 8mm videocassette explosion. It's called the Video Walkman and it's Sony's attempt to do with video what they did with audio. Not much larger than a hefty paperback, the Video Walkman features a three-inch LCD color TV screen with a data display and a full featured 8mm VCR. There are audio and video inputs and outputs, as well as a plug for a mini-camera. The compact battery packs can provide up to four hours of operation.

It's a remarkable machine. All of a sudden, your favorite film is as portable as a book. Headphones are included, and you can watch *Little Shop of Horrors* while you ride on a bus or wait at the dentist.

Sony plans on marketing a mini-camera that can be used for "video notetaking" and the compactness of the Walkman makes a whole range of voyeuristic activities possible, not all of them tax-deductible.

There's only one drawback to this nifty gadget, and that's the price—still well over a thousand dollars. But if the past is any indication, the price of the Video Walkman should eventually drop, making it an indispensable item in everyone's luggage. ●

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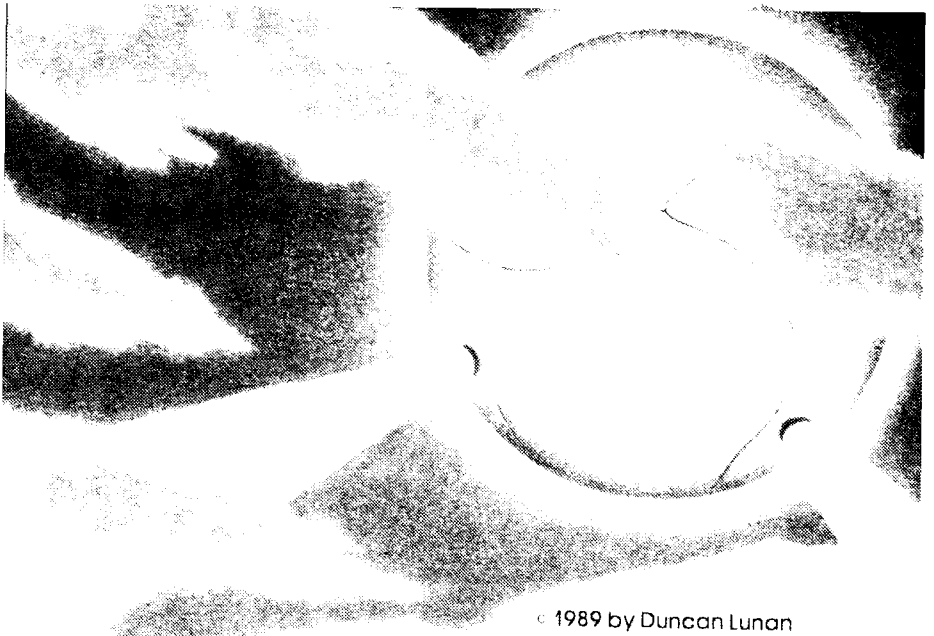

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IN THE ARCTIC, OUT OF TIME

by Duncan Lunan

"In the Arctic, Out of Time" is an intriguing adventure story that mixes the freezing Arctic winter with a number of other unsettling phenomena. The author resides in Glasgow, Scotland, and this absorbing tale is his first story to appear in *IAsfm*.

art: Bob Walters

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"Two ships coming around the headland, sir."

More straightened to look. "These waters are becoming as busy as the English Channel, bo'sun. What d'you make of them?"

"Can't tell much from here, sir—but we haven't seen them before."

"Pass the word to the captain, then." More went aft, and turned a telescope on the newcomers. They had seen the squadron: men were scrambling up the rigging to shorten sail.

The captain joined him at the rail. "What's this, Mr. More?"

"Two brigs, sir, flying the American flag. They've seen us all right." More passed him the instrument.

The first mate was waiting for orders. "Any signal, sir?"

"I don't think so. They're putting in to join us." The captain closed the telescope. "Get a reception party organized—and tidy up some of that deck cargo for'ard!" On deck and aloft, the *Resolute* was far from the usual neatness of a Queen's ship. Deck cargo of casks, sledges, ice-triangles, and ice-saws; powerful rigging and large blocks, to cope with the Arctic storms—but at the sight of another flag, even in mid-exploration, the impulse to improve her appearance was automatic.

The American ships dropped anchor a mile away, and a boat put out for the British squadron minutes later. The captain and More took up their position at the ship's side as it approached.

"Shall we pipe, sir?" asked the bo'sun.

"I think not, Brown." Both men in the stern of the boat seemed civilians, though in cold-weather gear it was hard to tell. By his awkwardness coming aboard, the older man wasn't even a seaman.

"Dr. Elisha Kane, sir, of the brig *Advance,*" said the first American, advancing with hand outstretched. "May I present Dr. Howard Hayes, of the Boston Geographical Society."

"Captain Austin, H.M.S. *Resolute,* at your service," the captain said formally. "My first lieutenant, Mr. More. Will you come below, gentlemen?"

In Austin's cabin, as they shed their fur suits and canvas jackets, the captain called for hot drinks. "It's an unexpected pleasure to meet other ships here," he said. "Though this year, it's less unusual. We overtook Captain Penny's ships earlier this week, and two days ago we sighted another vessel in the Strait."

"No doubt that was the *Prince Albert,* financed by Lady Franklin," said Kane. "She spoke the *Advance* yesterday. They've been searching Barrow Strait and Wellington Channel, but without success, alas."

"Captain Penny's ships were likewise equipped by Lady Franklin," More told him. "She remains convinced of her husband's survival."

"Lady Franklin's misfortune has aroused a great deal of sympathy in the United States," said Kane. "Our two ships, the *Advance* and the

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Rescue, were fitted out by Mr. Henry Grinnell to search for Franklin's party. Has nothing been found?"

"We've found their first winter quarters," said Austin. "It's only a matter of time, now, before their fate is discovered. I've dispatched two of my ships, the *Assistance* and *Intrepid,* in the direction of Cape Riley, and that's one of the last possibilities in this area. But after five years, I fear hope must be abandoned. Some survivors of the expedition might have found shelter with the Esquimaux to the south; but if so, word of them should have reached civilization by now."

"And is this the view of the Admiralty in England?"

"Not officially, of course," said Austin. "But my orders are first to establish whether or not a passage to the west exists along Barrow Strait from Lancaster Sound, *at the same time* searching for traces of Sir John Franklin's expedition. We hope to be back in England by October 1851."

"I see," said Hayes. "Captain, it's possible you could do us a very great service. May I ask you first to look over these papers?"

He produced three documents and passed them to Austin. More saw only the seal. The captain read them through. "I am asked to extend every assistance to your party, Doctor. Though a ship of Her Majesty's Navy is not bound to comply, a request from so high in the United States' administration must almost be received as a command."

"I wouldn't have you feel under any duress, Captain. But I would be very grateful if my daughters and I may transfer to your ships, to continue our work through the winter."

At the word "daughters" the captain's expression changed sharply. "A winter in the ice-pack, sir—surely no place for young ladies, especially on a naval vessel. Without appearing inhospitable, let me urge you to take your party south and continue your research in another season."

Hayes was apologetic. "That might seem to be best—but Commander De Haven fears, from the climatic conditions, that his ships may be caught in the 'middle ice' of Baffin Bay. They are not equipped for wintering in the ice, and conditions aboard would be at least unpleasant, at worst hazardous."

"Extremely so, if the hulls were to be nipped," Austin agreed. "I shall review our position as regards stores and equipment, Doctor, and let you have my decision within the hour. Please call my steward if you require anything. Mr. More, come with me, please."

A midshipman was dispatched to fetch the chief quartermaster. "This is a fine situation," said the captain. "The fellow must know their president, or even be related to him, to judge from those letters! I can't risk a diplomatic incident, not when those ships have been sent by a philanthropist to search for Franklin. We can't refuse to take their passengers,

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if there's a chance they won't get through Baffin Bay before the ice closes in."

"If they're not prepared for the winter, they'd have scurvy to contend with," More agreed.

"And if the ships are crushed, they'll be lucky to survive at all unless they reach a whaling station," Austin went on. "Imagine the outcry if we refused and these young women perished!"

However reluctantly, Austin had to take the American scientists aboard. The *Resolute* had a tier of cabins on each side, for her unusually large complement of officers; it was arranged that More would share with the third lieutenant, so putting his own cabin and the third's at the Americans' disposal when the second lieutenant, McLintock, moved to the other side. By the time their gear was moved next day, the scientists and their equipment were on their way across.

Dr. Hayes came aboard first, to supervise the hoisting of wooden boxes marked "Instruments—With Care." Then the girls came up the side, each followed by an American sailor in case of accident. Despite the cold wind, they both threw back their fur hoods to be introduced to the captain. More was struck immediately by the contrast in their looks: the taller one was blonde, almost Scandinavian in appearance, while the other's hair was wavy and jet black. Her height was little over five feet. Perhaps they're only half-sisters, More thought as the remaining dunnage was hoisted to the deck. The older girl put up her hood again almost at once, though Austin was inviting his guests to come below; but the other, still bare-headed, took an appraising look round before she followed. Her eyes met More's and stopped—just for a second, but he felt his insides turn to water. Without resuming her survey of the deck, she turned and followed the others aft.

To his satisfaction, More recollected himself a second before the American officer at his side. As More's eye lit on him, he too clicked back to reality. "There's one thing I can say, sir," he said, turning to the ship's side. "I am purely sorry not to see the effect that young lady will have on Her Majesty's Navy!" And with that he was gone, following the sailors into the boat; leaving More to look after him, in turn, trying to extrapolate from that parting shot.

Near mid-day, the *Resolute*'s search parties returned from the shore. Penny's ships had gone on, intending to make another landing further along the coast; *Pioneer* already had steam up. To save time Austin ordered the tender to tow *Resolute* into the main channel, crews lining the decks for the customary three cheers as they passed Grinnell's two ships. The two girls appeared briefly aft to wave handkerchiefs, but the cold drove them below long before the *Resolute* made sail.

Progress along the Strait was slow; the wind was freshening, and

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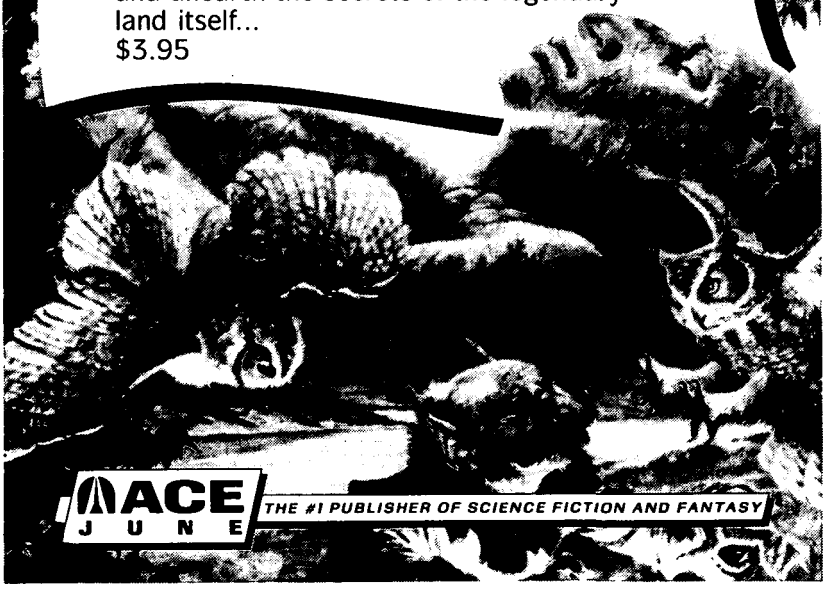

ACE
JUNE

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beginning to turn against them. Penny's ships were still ahead when More was relieved, and with great relief went below. The weather, he foresaw, would be thoroughly nasty by nightfall. He left his heavy jacket and gloves in his new cabin, and set off to claim the hot tea that should be waiting at the change of watch. Returning with it, he met an astonishing apparition.

Though the girls had come aboard in long skirts, cold-weather gear had hidden their femininity. Below decks, however, warm air was distributed mechanically. The dark girl was now wearing sailor's shirt and trousers, but the effect was anything but masculine.

"Oh, come on, Lieutenant!" she said brightly, before he found words. "It can't be *that* long since you left England, surely?"

"Young ladies don't dress like that in England," said More, swallowing hard.

She dropped him a curtsey—and he'd never seen that done in trousers before. "Why, thank you, sir! I'm glad you approve."

Naval officers are not fools—not even when facing astonishing young women, instead of fire and storm. More could almost hear her saying, "But, Captain, Lieutenant More said it was all right."

"No, miss," he said firmly, "your clothes would cause a stir there."

"No doubt," she said casually. "When we reach England, I shall have to be demure and conventional. But for a winter in the ice, I must dress practically, don't you agree?"

"I don't think it'll be necessary to go to these lengths, miss."

"I have a feeling I'll surprise you, Lieutenant," she said with disconcerting firmness. "I've come to the Arctic to work, to conduct a serious scientific investigation, not to be decorative at the captain's table. Right now, for instance, I'm going to make friends with the crew, and I want them to accept me as an equal, not as some fashionable lady amusing herself. Excuse me?"

That did catch More unprepared. The Americans were obviously under the captain's authority on the *Resolute*—but could More place the fo'c'sle out of bounds to them without referring to Austin? Probably not. He let her go, unable to resist staring after her, then made at once for the captain's cabin.

There were no immediate repercussions from the girl's trip for'ard, though neither More nor Austin could imagine the effect of her arrival. Austin felt that he couldn't restrict his guests' movements until something did happen—probably an embarrassed deputation of seamen, asking for Miss Hayes's visits to be stopped. That rough masculine environment was all Jack could call his own at sea, and he would fight to preserve it. But nothing did happen, and More found himself burning

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with curiosity. Could she really have pulled it off, and been "accepted as an equal"? Of course it was unthinkable to ask.

The gale continued all next day, keeping the passengers below deck where everyone would like to be. Little progress was made through the ice, although *Pioneer* took the *Resolute* in tow. The gale was too fierce for gunpowder or ice-saws to be used, and to work the two ships around bergs *Pioneer* often had to take the *Resolute* cannon off the sides of the lead. So late in the season, these delays could make the difference between success and failure: the further *Resolute* penetrated before she was frozen in, the less old ice she would have to negotiate next summer to reach the western sea. Opinion at the Admiralty was known to be turning against the search for the North-West Passage, which had apparently claimed Franklin's two ships with all hands. Other lives had been lost on costly searching expeditions, and still no one had got through the Passage either way.

Next morning there were signs of a change, and by midday they were clear of the pack. Both Austin and More were on deck when the bo'sun's whistle sent the men scrambling aloft. One figure heading for the upper fore topsail looked strangely small—but before More caught on fully, the captain's bellow rang across the deck.

"Bo'sun, have that young woman brought down from the mast—and escort her aft, to me!"

Everything stopped. In the general scramble to the yards, few if any of the crew had realized the girl was with them. They hung staring in the shrouds as the girl returned to the deck, without help from the seaman ordered across to her. She walked aft proudly ahead of Brown, hair whipping under her cap. Another roared order set the men scrambling again to make sail.

Austin was head and shoulders taller than the girl, but she was in no way intimidated. Her eyes were bright, and a smile was threatening to break out. She had wanted to see how far she could go, and now she was looking forward to an argument; but Austin gave her no chance to make a speech. "Miss Hayes, in your visits to the fo'c'sle, have you made the acquaintance of the sailmaker, Thomas Kelly?"

It wasn't the opening she'd expected. "Old Tom?—Why yes. He's a sweet old fellow."

One point back to her, thought More, mentally keeping score without taking his eyes off the work aloft. But it wasn't enough to stop the captain. "Ahem! quite so. Then on your next visit there, having first of course obtained the permission of the captain of the forecastle, please give Mr. Kelly my compliments and ask him to sing 'Farewell Nancy.' I don't doubt that the song is in his repertoire."

Her baffled pause must have lasted a good two seconds. "Er—yes,

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Captain. Thank you." She went below, and More could return his attention to the deck at last.

"Nicely done, sir, if I may say so."

"I thought it wasn't bad, Mr. More. Curiosity will drive her to it, I imagine, and the hint may be more effective than a direct order. God, I always knew American women were emancipated, but that one thinks she's fully the equal of a man!"

"Her upbringing must have been extraordinary," More agreed. "Even in the United States, I can't imagine her behavior being accepted at any level of society."

"And yet she's a highly educated young woman," said the captain. "To have mastered the sciences so thoroughly, of course, she's had to have private tuition, mostly from her father; but to be capable of absorbing it, she must have been at the best of schools beforehand. Quite a number of them, I imagine," he added drily.

Although it was midday, the sun was low in the sky. Ice-bows surrounded it, and the "blink" of ice was noticeable on the horizon. The isolated bergs in the channel were becoming more numerous, beginning to take on the appearance of a pack once again.

Kelly was singing "Saint James's Infirmary" when the girl came into the fo'c'sle. She tried to join the listeners unnoticed, but someone coughed loudly and an embarrassed silence fell.

"Oh, don't stop just because I came in," she said.

Kelly looked down at his feet. "That's not a fit song for you to hear, miss."

She grinned. "Try me! It's a lovely song. There's an American version, did you know?"

"The cap'n'd have the skin off my back, Miss Diana, if he heard I'd offended your ears with it."

A seaman gave up his place, and was rewarded with a radiant smile as she slipped into the circle. "Oh, but he told me to ask you. The captain wants you to sing for me."

Kelly smiled. "I can hardly believe that, miss."

"He did too! Just after I went up the foremast this morning. I thought he would raise Cain about that, but all he told me was to ask for this song. 'Farewell Nancy'—is that right?"

"I see," said Kelly, not at all pleased.

"Don't you know it?"

"Why yes, miss, it's sold as a broadside at home, and very popular."

"Come on, then."

"Well, I think the captain was just having his little joke, miss," Kelly said hopefully.

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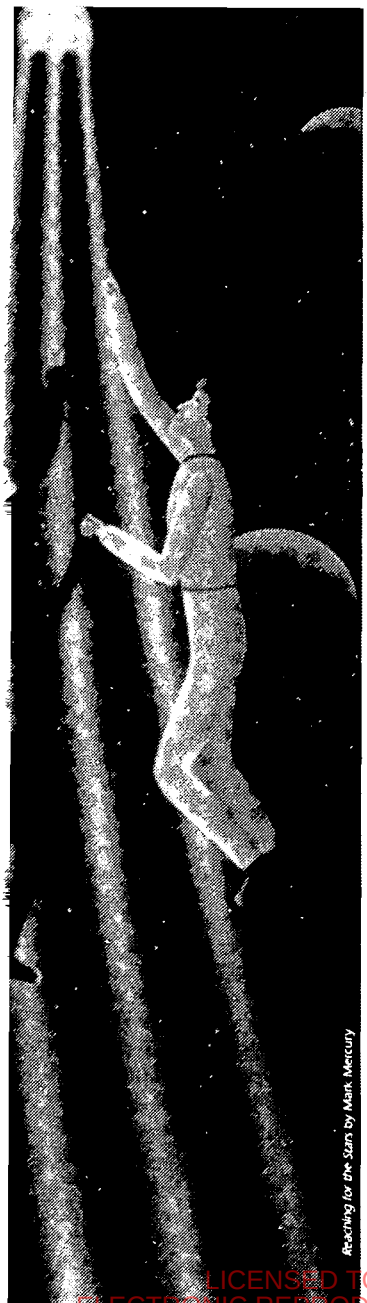

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"Oh no," Diana assured him. "It was the last thing in the world I expected him to say, but it wasn't any joke. 'Give Mr. Kelly my compliments, and ask him to sing "Farewell Nancy." ' I didn't even know you sang—I haven't heard a note of music since I came aboard this ship."

"Better you never had, miss, if it was left up to me," Kelly said heavily. "Give me a note on the accordion, Bill."

He cleared his throat:

Fare you well, my dearest Nancy, for now I must leave you,
All across the western ocean I am bound for to go;
Don't let me long voyage to trouble and grieve you,
For I will return in the spring as you know.

Then she says:

Like a little seaboy I'll dress and go with you,
In the midst of all dangers your help I'll remain.
In the cold stormy weather when the winds are a-blowin',
My dear I'll be ready to reef your topsail.

"I think, miss, this verse would be the one the captain wanted you to hear. . . .

Well your pretty slender fingers couldn't handle our tackle,
Your delicate feet to our topmast can't go,
And your little behind, love, would freeze in the wind, love,
I would have you at home when the stormy winds do blow.

"I see," she murmured. She heard the song out to the end, and praised Kelly's singing. "Are there many songs about girls dressing up as sailors and going to sea?"

"Yes, miss; it's a common dream of lads on long trips, I suppose. But the captain wouldn't suggest you heard 'Short Jacket and White Trousers,' or 'The Handsome Cabin Boy,' for instance."

"Why not, Tom? You can tell me, I won't take offense."

"Well, you see, in those songs the captain himself fancies the young girl concerned; and in one of them, well, he acts on it, y'see."

There were grins from the crew and Kelly would have changed the subject; but Diana gave him a wicked smile, drawing up her knees and hugging them. "Sing me that!" she demanded.

More was on watch next day when the girls came on deck. It was the first time he had seen them attempt any naturalistic work, though that morning Dr. Hayes had towed a small net over the side for an hour, bringing up a surprising number of marine organisms. The girls seemed mainly interested in the few sea birds still following the ship; watching them through a glass they made a few sketches, and tried to lure some with scraps of bread. But Diana seemed to grow bored, and came to tackle More.

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"Why don't you let the men sing at work?"

Taken aback once again! "Pardon, miss?"

"I asked Tom Kelly to sing for me last night, as the captain suggested. Don't act surprised, Lieutenant, I bet you didn't miss a word of that conversation! But old Tom told me you don't allow singing on deck, not that anyone would want to in this weather."

"That's quite true," said More. "Queen's Regulations, miss, I'm afraid."

"Mean regulations, if you ask me," she went on. "You can't call the songs 'forebitters' if they're not allowed to sing on the forebitts. I want to register a protest!"

"It'll go at the very head of my report," More promised, amused. The coming winter certainly wasn't going to be dull—if they could keep her from tearing the whole ship apart!

"Yeah, I bet. But what about those fabulous work songs we had on our ships—the hauling shanties, capstan shanties, and the rest? They're not exactly fun, unless you're listening to them, but they help the work along."

"I dare say they do, miss, but this is a naval vessel. We set rhythms for hauling with the bo'sun's whistle, as I'm sure you've heard. It's not for us to argue with Q.R.'s."

"Yah, the Queen's a meanie." She stuck out her tongue and wandered back to the rail. When she got to England, More realized, she might well be presented at court. He hoped he'd be there to see that. The older girl, Evelyn, had been listening to their conversation with an ambiguous smile. More suspected her of playing a part: she was always demure, taking the air on deck on father's arm, but he thought she was capable of the same antics as her sister. She expected Diana to get her fingers burned, and she'd be amused by it, if it wasn't too serious.

The wind was still unfavorable and progress was slow. Just after noon a brilliant series of parhelia and halos formed around the sun, and More dispatched a midshipman to inform the Americans. Two orange halos encircled the true sun, the larger one intersected by a prismatic halo surrounding the zenith. Parallel to the horizon, four parhelia appeared in the vertical halos; belts of orange connected them to the true sun, and another ran down to a deep orange mass on the horizon. On the sides away from the sun, the parhelia were elongated into cones of prismatic colors.

"That's a sign of cold weather," More remarked to Diana, who happened to be nearest him. "As one of the seamen put it, 'When them 'ere sun dogs shows themselves we always gets double allowance from Jack Frost.' "

"The ice is certainly getting thicker," she replied. The *Resolute* was

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still making progress under sail, but course changes were more and more frequent.

"*Pioneer* will have to tow us soon," said More. "We shan't get much further, I believe—there's 'ice blink' all along the horizon ahead."

"Yeah, that's no water sky," she said, making him feel rather foolish: with her inquiring mind, she'd have learned to read the Arctic sky on the *Advance*. She had put on a curious pair of darkened spectacles, which she now handed to him. "Try these, Lieutenant, the effect's much more noticeable."

The glasses made an astonishing difference. Unlike the smoked ones and veils used by the Navy, they cut out eyestrain without otherwise limiting vision. "That's amazing," said More. "How's it done?"

"It's a special glass," said Diana. "It eliminates the glare, which is caused by light scattered from the ice."

"We've got to hand it to you Americans for ingenuity," said More. "There wouldn't be much risk of snow blindness using these. Another good idea we'll hear nothing more about, I suppose—what the devil's that?"

"What?" she asked. Without the glasses, she was now at a disadvantage.

"A dark speck, over there. It'll be directly below the sun in a moment, it's just entering the orange column. Dr. Hayes, sir, can you see it?"

"I can indeed, sir." The scientist had whipped out a small telescope. "It's too far off to make out—but it's no bird, I'll swear to that!"

"Listen!" said Diana. A low sound, like continuous distant thunder, was rolling over the ship.

"Icebergs breaking off some glacier?" More suggested weakly.

Everyone on deck was staring now, as the speck moved steadily across their bows. "It's twelve degrees above the horizon," announced Barnes, the third lieutenant. When the mystery appeared, he had been measuring the separations of the parhelia for the log.

"I never heard a mirage make a sound before, sir," said the man at the wheel, nervously. Sailors were superstitious, even in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The speck passed on, and was lost behind the islands on their starboard bow. The sound faded, and More looked hopefully to Hayes for some explanation.

"Fascinating," said the American. He seemed strangely excited. "Fascinating."

"Could you advance any hypothesis, sir, as to what that was we saw?"

Hayes pulled himself together. "No, sir, I have nothing to suggest. If we could believe our eyes, we should have to say: a flying machine, traveling north, perhaps to the Pole itself. But obviously that's impos-

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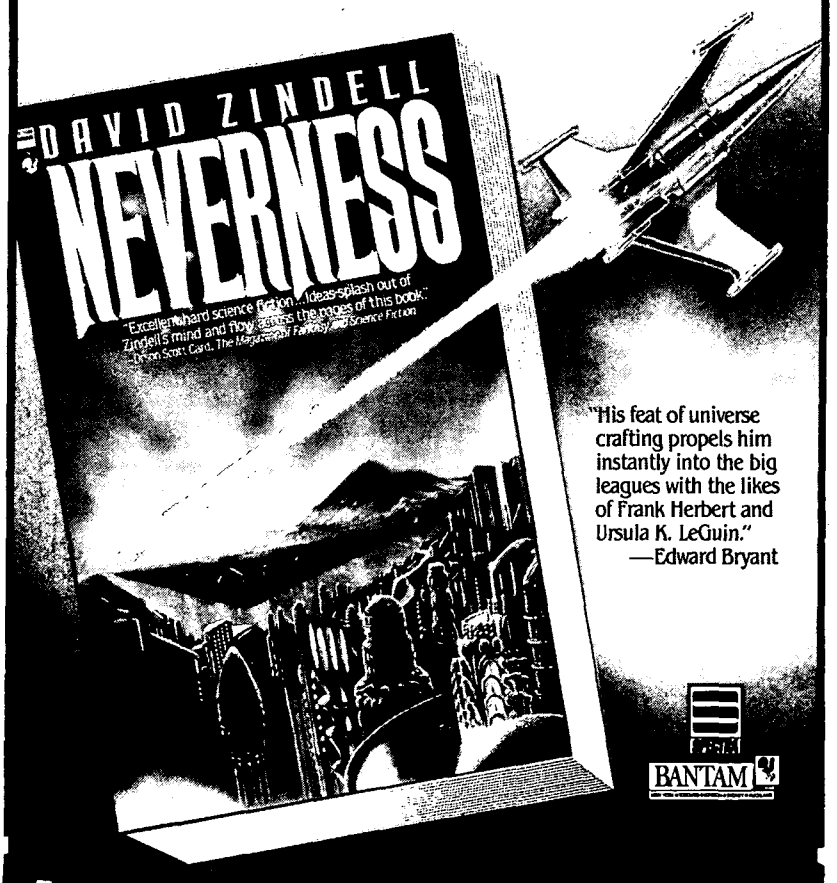
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sible; quite impossible, gentlemen." But he was still intensely excited, and almost at once he went below.

As the seaman had predicted, the day grew colder as it wore on. Young ice formed over the sea as soon as darkness fell. The night was bitter, the stars overhead so brilliant that it seemed unfair they gave no warmth. Next morning ice met the eye in all directions; the ships continued to make progress along the few clear lanes remaining, but soon after midday a chill fog reached out across the channel. Frost formed on the shrouds and deck fittings as the *Resolute* crept on, taking soundings with increasing frequency. When they anchored the ships to the ice at nightfall, it was estimated that they were in the lee of Griffith's Island, sighted ahead in the forenoon.

There had been another strange episode during the day, however. The Hayes party had come on deck in mid-afternoon, and remained for some time despite the biting chill—almost, More thought afterwards, as if they were waiting for something. They had been on deck for nearly an hour when another strange sound came to their ears.

"That can't be the beat of *Pioneer*'s screws, surely," said Barnes, his head cocked to the side.

"If it were, she'd be bearing down on us at an incredible speed," said More. The fog made it impossible to place the mechanical throbbing, but it was growing swiftly in volume. "Sound the foghorn, there—and the bell, continuously!"

The noise doubled and redoubled, till the open air was like an engine-room. People looked in all directions, wildly, and Barnes was first to see the thing when it appeared.

It was only a shadow in the mist, shapeless, lit with an eerie glow. Beneath it a beam of light shone, like a single ray of sunshine. It came from astern, from roughly where *Pioneer* should be, and passed the *Resolute*'s port side, turning north across her bows. In a moment it had vanished, and the deafening noise was soon muffled by the fog.

If yesterday's phenomenon had excited the Americans, today's stimulated them beyond speech. Looking round for their comments More saw them disappearing below, leaving him to face the bewildered stares of the crew.

He had to show the ship's officers were not alarmed. "It seems there's another mystery in these waters, besides the disappearance of Sir John Franklin," he remarked, as outwardly calm as Austin would have been.

"You don't think—they might be connected, sir?" the helmsman ventured.

"We've no reason to think so at present," said More, with a firmness which wasn't entirely genuine. "But if there is a connection, Her Maj-

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esty's Navy will get to the bottom of it. Mr. Jones!" The midshipman, who was listening with awed respect, snapped to alertness. "You saw as much as we did, I suppose? Report it to the captain, if you please. *If he asks,* say that in my opinion he's not required on deck meantime. If anything more occurs, of course we will inform him."

But nothing more did happen, up to the time the *Resolute* found solid ice ahead. *Pioneer* was somewhere astern, out of hailing distance. The fog was still spread over the ships next day, and since they had a firm anchorage on the edge of the floe Austin decided not to move. The pack ice was closing in, impelled by wind and tides further up the channel. Throughout the day the pack grew more compressed, and the hull began to creak and stir uneasily as it took the pressure. Though the *Resolute*'s hull was doubled with wood, the bow and stern made to resemble the ends of a caisson with alternate layers of wood and iron, everyone wondered uneasily if she would in fact withstand the strain. By nightfall, however, there was still no danger.

Jones and Middleton, the two midshipmen, were playing cards down in their berth. Near the waterline the grinding noises from the ice were louder, so they didn't hear Diana's approach.

"May I join you, boys?"

Both leaped to their feet. "Miss Diana! We didn't . . . that is . . ."

"Now don't get uptight," she said, whatever that odd expression might mean. "I just wondered what you two were doing down here, when the ship's anchored."

"There's very little to do, miss," Jones agreed. "Unless the officers invite us for cards or conversation, we're left to our own devices down here. There's always studying to be done, of course, but too much reading strains the eyes."

"You haven't much light for reading," she agreed, eyeing the cards. "What did I interrupt—millions of dollars changing hands here?"

"Er—not exactly, miss. We *were* playing for coppers, just to make it more interesting."

"That's good, I might just about be able to raise the stake then." She moved nearer to the sea-chest serving as a table. "Deal me in?"

Diana won the first game, very easily. "You let me win out of politeness!" she accused. They were both in their midteens, and their blushes gave them away. She kidded them unmercifully, until their only defense was to play properly. Half-an-hour later, she had lost four games in a row and discovered she had no more change.

"Well, you'll have to trust me, gentlemen. If I don't regain my fortune in the next few hands, I'll have to settle up with you tomorrow."

"Oh, that's no good, Miss Diana," said Jones. He'd had his daily rum ration not long before she joined them, and in the stuffy 'tweendecks

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atmosphere it had gone a little to his head—along with the excitement of the game and the general effect of Diana's company. "Debts have to be settled on the spot, here."

"Then you must give me a chance to win something back," she said, laughing. "I can't pay!"

"If you can't pay up, we must each have a kiss," said Jones, greatly daring. "Don't you agree, Middleton?"

Diana looked at him coyly, from under her long lashes. "I fear, sir, my kisses are not won so easily."

"We'll see about that," cried Jones, carried away. "Catch her, Middleton!"

"Oh no you don't!" A laughing scuffle ensued. Middleton found it surprisingly hard to catch her by the arms: the thought occurred to him that she might even know how to fight in earnest.

"What the devil is this?" Brown, who was responsible for discipline below decks, loomed over them. The cane grasped in his hand gave his authority some emphasis.

Jones scrambled to his feet, suddenly sobered. "Just a friendly game of cards, sir," he offered. It sounded weak.

"Cards!" snorted the bo'sun. "Cards are very well, gentlemen, but they don't let you turn the ship into a bear-garden. Anything else to say? Middleton?"

"Nothing, sir." They both knew what was coming.

"Then, gentlemen, I'll trouble you to bend. Leave us, Miss Hayes, if you please."

"There's no need for this!" Diana protested. "It *was* just a friendly game, even if it got a little out of hand. Maybe that was my fault."

"I don't doubt that it was, miss. I trust you will take note of the outcome."

"If you punish them, in that case, you should cane me, too!"

"It may come to that in future, miss, with the captain's authority," Brown said grimly. "I know he has asked you, more than once, to dress and act as befits a lady of your station. If you prefer to dress like the boys and lead them into mischief, you may well share their punishment in future. Mr. Jones, step forward!"

Word of Brown's threat went round the ship like wildfire. There was, indeed, an erotic rumor that it had been carried out, and that the girl admired her bruises before a mirror night and morning. More was displeased to find himself stirred by it; though not more so, probably, than any other man aboard. Most of the crew would have liked nothing better than a chance to check the story. The danger, or possibly some guilt for Middleton and Jones, kept Diana from actively disturbing the ship for

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a few days, though her voice and manner remained provocative; but a more serious incident was to subdue her still further.

Austin had waited throughout the next morning for a showdown with Dr. Hayes. Nothing happened, which was a little disconcerting; but Austin was not easily put off. When the afternoon watch produced no request for an interview, Austin took the initiative and had the scientist summoned to his cabin.

"I've been expecting to hear from you, Dr. Hayes, concerning last night's disciplinary action."

"There didn't seem to be any occasion for that, sir. I hope Diana has learned her lesson. I know she has been a trial to you since we came aboard."

"Good God, man, can't you control your own daughter?"

Hayes shrugged helplessly. "She lacks a mother's influence." He seemed to find the idea almost funny.

"Dr. Hayes, I have been very patient with these disturbances to the ship's routine, but now they must stop. Brown is responsible for order below decks. Your daughter put him in an impossible position, and he took the only conceivable action."

"Oh, I agree, Captain. I think your bo'sun handled the situation very well. Diana's a law unto herself, but this experience should teach her some restraint. I don't think she's fully appreciated, until now, what it is to be aboard a naval vessel; I'm only glad she wasn't responsible for any more serious breach of discipline."

"So am I, sir, very glad indeed. Let me remind you that we face a full winter in darkness, trapped in the ice of this channel. If your daughter's behavior were to provoke an assault on her, that would be a hanging matter. Even if I considered the men concerned had been led on, as those boys were last night, I would have no alternative. I expect you to ensure, Doctor, that no such incident occurs. Good day, sir!"

An icy gale arose, clearing away the mist. It showed the *Resolute* completely surrounded by ice, about a mile from shore, with *Pioneer* about the same distance off to the east. It began to look as if the ships were fast for the winter, as the ice grew still more compacted under the thrust of the wind and pressure ridges began to rise around them. The hull continued to resist the ice, and Lieut. McLintock was seen checking his sledges and equipment. Austin waited for the ice to settle more firmly; and on the second day he had another breach of discipline to contend with.

The seaman gave his name as "Jenkins." Somehow, as he questioned the man, More formed the idea that the name might be an alias. He had been found searching the Hayes party's cabin, and refused to give any

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explanation or say anything in his defense. When he was brought before the captain, his attitude was the same.

"A final chance, Jenkins," Austin said at last. "Have you nothing at all to say before I pass sentence?"

"No, sir." The man seemed quite indifferent to the proceedings. He was tall, with a noticeable sun-tan and a surprisingly smooth face for a seaman. More had noticed him many times during the voyage, for his evident laziness as well as his height: he often came in for the rough edge of Brown's tongue, and probably on occasion for his boot.

"Very well. Two dozen lashes for attempted theft—and another dozen for dumb insolence. March him out!" As the door closed behind prisoner and escort, Austin turned to his first lieutenant. He was extremely displeased.

"It's my belief, Mr. More, that this will be the first flogging ever to be conducted in the search for the North-West Passage—probably the first within hundreds of miles of this latitude. A distinction I am most reluctant to claim for any ship or party under my command. I might further add, this is at most the fifth or sixth such punishment I have had to order since I gained my first command, and certainly the first on any of my voyages of exploration." All this was certainly true. Austin was one of the most celebrated naval explorers of the century, and well known as a firm but humane captain. There were hundreds of volunteers from the Fleet whenever he was preparing an expedition. All the *Resolute*'s crew were volunteers, and many of them, Brown for example, had sailed under him on previous voyages.

"Any comments, Mr. More?"

"Very few, sir. Jenkins is one of five men we took on at Plymouth, on our way down the Channel. His references were good, though he's never been to the Arctic before. Apparently he and his friends aren't much liked, however: they keep pretty much to themselves, off-watch."

Austin folded his hands on the table-top. "I don't like this, Mr. More. This has not been a happy voyage, even before the Americans came aboard. The regrettable differences between Lieutenant McLintock and myself have tended to promote rivalries among the crew. While that stress will be removed once McLintock is on his way, we will then be left short handed. Unfortunately *Assistance* and *Intrepid* have not rejoined us before the ice closed in, so we may have to wait until next spring to balance up the crews. Meantime, I have here Lieutenant McLintock's provisional selections for the sledge parties; and I note that none of the Plymouth clique are among them. I'd like to separate them, Mr. More. I don't suppose I can *order* McLintock to take them; he couldn't refuse, but it would be bad for morale, and make it obvious that we see these men as a threat."

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Austin looked up. "I'll leave this in your hands for the moment, Mr. More. Find out if any of them volunteered for the search parties; if not, see if any of them can be induced to do so; and if they can, try to persuade Lieutenant McLintock to include them."

More left the cabin, wondering how far this incident would go in its consequences. Already, with the grim ritual of a flogging ahead, it was a cloud "bigger than a man's hand." Austin hadn't needed to state the possibility he saw in the coming night: that his ship might gain the further distinction of the first Arctic mutiny.

The Americans kept to their quarters during the punishment, but the incident finally brought home to Diana the severity of the discipline she had been upsetting. She resumed the same modest costume as her sister, and kept to the after part of the ship.

Beyond doubt, the *Resolute* was fixed in the ice for the winter. By the time the gale blew itself out, great pressure ridges twenty feet or more in height were thrusting up out of the pack, especially between the ships and Griffith's Island. Only the tips of *Pioneer*'s masts could be seen, and parties crossing from ship to ship detoured to avoid treacherous footing. The sledges were unloaded and trial runs were made, as McLintock's party prepared for departure.

Diana Hayes was on deck with More and the captain, when McLintock came up with a fistful of papers. "These are my requisitions for the journey, sir. I'd be obliged if you'd grant them your formal approval."

"H'm. Clothing list per man: one inside flannel, one serge frock, one duck jumper, one pair of drawers, one pair of breeches, one Welsh wig . . . I'll have to go through all of this at length, Mr. McLintock. Come below, please. Excuse me, Miss Hayes."

"There's something between those two, isn't there?" Diana remarked, as they disappeared into the hatchway.

"Pointless to deny it," More agreed. "Inevitable, really, when you consider it. Captain Austin is one of the last great naval explorers: the world's so well known these days, the search for the North-West Passage is probably the last challenge apart from the Poles themselves. McLintock's likewise the acknowledged master of sledge exploration, since his search for Franklin south of Barrow Strait, and he's out to prove that the North-West Passage is penetrable by sledge. He sees a future of trading camps along the Strait, like coaching stations. Naturally he sees Captain Austin as a rival looking for a sea passage, and it's believed in the Fleet that this expedition will prove one or the other of them to be right."

"I see. So McLintock's going on, to reach the far end of the Passage before all daylight goes?"

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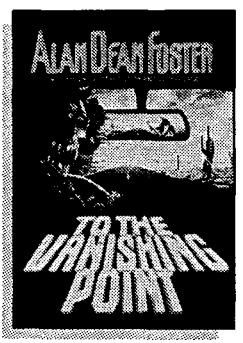

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A WORD FROM Brian Thomsen

Vacations are fun, a time for new experiences or the opportunity to reacquaint yourself with someone or something. I always like to travel to different parts of the country, meet new people and make new friends, whether it's for a weekend convention or just a bit of sightseeing. (I have to admit, though, that I've never taken the Hell turnoff outside of Las Vegas, as featured in Alan Dean Foster's TO THE VANISHING POINT.)

East Coast, West Coast, Mid-America, countryside and cityscape: seeing them is what vacations are for. If perchance you can't travel in person, there's always a book to transport you there—from Mr. Foster's hellacious California to THE HORMONE JUNGLE*'s cities of the future.*

When you see me around (at work or on vacation), ask me for some tips on good summer reading.

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"That's right. If they get through they'll rendezvous with McLure's *Investigator,* somewhere beyond Melville Island, and return to us in the spring. I don't say the captain hopes they'll turn back, but it'll be a triumph for him if *he's* the first man through the Passage, by ship, next year."

"Well, I'll cheer for the captain," she declared. "Do you think he'll get his triumph, or will the sledges get through first?"

"The signs aren't hopeful," More said sadly. "On the trial runs the sledges have found old ice out beyond the islands, suggesting that the channel remains blocked throughout the summer. If that's the case, we'll be forced to turn back towards Baffin Bay before the end of the season."

"That would be a shame," she said. "I'd like to be the first girl through the North-West Passage. . . . How can you tell that it's old ice out there?"

More was becoming used to her changes of mental direction. "When sea ice forms it's blue and glassy. Often it breaks up into small hummocks in the pack, but it's still no real hindrance to a sledge because of its smoothness. Under summer sunshine it becomes dirty and yellowish, and pools form on its surface, leaving it uneven when it freezes again. The more seasons the ice lasts, the more difficult it becomes to cross."

"So you can tell an ice-floe's history just by looking at it," she mused. "I don't suppose they'd take me with the sledge parties, do you?"

"Oh, too much to hope for," More agreed with feeling.

"The captain might send you along to look after me," she retorted. Her voice suddenly became unbelievably seductive. "And wouldn't that be nice for both of us?"

More was taken by surprise again. For a second he thought the Arctic wind had stopped blowing. She was standing directly before him, looking up into his eyes. "You look pretty good with ice in your beard," she went on casually, but without shifting her gaze.

"It may look manly, but it irritates the lips a good deal," More managed, unable to believe this was happening.

"Hey, that's too bad," she said sympathetically, managing to make fun of him at the same time—and then she thrust her hands deep into her pockets and spun away from him, off to see the sledge dogs being hoisted over the side.

By nightfall, all was ready for the sledges to set out at first light. Though McLintock believed that the only way through the Passage was over the ice, he was still a naval officer and beyond doubt this was a naval party. Each sledge was named, and officially designated: H.M. Sledge *Perseverance, Endeavor,* and *Lady Franklin.* In tribute to the American passengers, and the New York philanthropist whose ships had brought them, one was duly christened H.M. Sledge *Grinnell,* by Evelyn Hayes. Each sledge had its own flag and motto—"One and all," "Nil

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desperandum," "Prospice respice." More's favorite, for the sledge *Resolute,* read "St. George and merry England; onward to the rescue"; showing that one officer, at least, still considered himself to be searching primarily for Franklin. The sledges were loaded with tents, sleeping bags, cooking apparatus, guns, instruments . . . and printed notices to be placed in cairns along the way, giving the position of the ships and the location of food depots. One party, More happened to know, also carried advertising bills for the Margate Steam Packet Company, which should puzzle any wandering Esquimaux or plundering bears. Another detail which appealed to him, in the plan of operations, was the order reading "The several parties are to understand, that they have the option of leaving behind any portion of their allowance of rum, and that a proper proportion of tea will be given in compensation for it."

A small party of men, including More and the captain, went with the sledge parties for the first ten miles along the Strait. Progress was good at first, but slowed when they hit the old, uneven ice beyond the islands. The heavier sledges, drawn by dogs, were able to press on, but those pulled by the men became heavy burdens as soon as their sails were lowered. The experimental kites, intended to lift the prows of the sledges to make progress easier, proved effective at first but were unreliable when the wind became gusty. After two hours of hauling and slipping on the difficult hummocks, More was heartily glad when the captain decided to turn back. The crews exchanged three cheers, and Austin wished the sledge parties God speed; and without any wish to be sharing the journey ahead, those left behind returned to the icebound ships.

With the sledge parties gone, there was unusual freedom of movement on the cramped decks of the *Resolute.* More had a cabin to himself again, a luxury he would certainly welcome during the trying months of the winter. He intended to do some serious reading, though he wouldn't have much free time: he would be heavily involved in activities to make the winter pass quickly—amateur dramatics, concerts, a ship's newspaper. . . .

Snow covered all the islands by late September, and fox tracks were seen on the ice around the ships. Canvas housings like huge tents were put up over the decks; and the lumber was cleared off, to make room for exercise in bad weather.

None of the five men from Plymouth had gone with the sledge parties. McLintock, knowing their bad record and unpopularity, had simply declined to take them, and for Austin to thrust them upon him might be construed as attempted sabotage. For the grim race with winter he had undertaken, McLintock was entitled to willing helpers who would pull their weight. But as the days grew noticeably shorter, and the work to be done grew less, it seemed that the clique obeyed orders and stood

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watches only because they chose to do so. Another showdown over "dumb insolence" seemed inevitable; Brown was seen to carry his cane more aggressively, and even on occasion to produce a rope's end.

By November the sun no longer broke the horizon even at midday, and the ships should have been settled into winter routine. Instead there was the feeling of an impending threat, and people tended to look over their shoulders as they went about the ship. Once More came upon the five Plymouth men standing together in a circle, as if listening to voices far away. When he demanded "What's this?" they just stared at him, and walked away.

Something had to be done. Even Diana Hayes seemed uneasy about the disruptive influences working in the ship. Penny's ships were twenty miles away, too far to help if there were trouble. Austin brought men and officers over from *Pioneer,* and ordered the sergeant of marines to keep alert. It seemed impossible for five men to take over the *Resolute* from twenty, but on the other hand, he couldn't place them all in detention without definite cause. The bad old days of the war against Bonaparte were far in the past; and apart from the attempted theft weeks ago, the suspects had committed no open breach of discipline. They paid a great deal of attention to the Hayes party, however; it might just be because two of them were girls, but it was as if the Americans were being shadowed. Each time the watcher was ordered for'ard, his obedience was more indifferent. They seemed to be openly waiting for something to happen; but what *could* happen, so far from civilization, defied the imagination.

"Something strikes you as funny, Mr. More?"

"I was just wondering, sir, how Lieutenant Osborn will describe these events, when he relays them all to the world."

"Scribbling again, is he?" said Austin. "What's this epic to be called?"

More chuckled. "He's trying to keep it a secret, sir. But *Stray Leaves from an Arctic Journal* is the title rumored around."

Austin groaned. "Stray leaves aren't common up here, or leaves of any sort. I don't know where young officers get their literary influences, these days." He picked up a report from the table. " 'At 2.00 hours, being still confined to the tents by the gale, we remarked the approach of a bear. We loaded our guns with ball, which we discharged at a range of fifteen yards. We took Bruin in the shoulder, little to his liking evidently, for at once he took to his heels. . . .' Can you imagine how this will be received by My Lords of the Admiralty?"

In daylight, this part of the Arctic had been desolate; but a full silver moon, wheeling around the zenith for several days and nights, cast a new beauty over the scene. Tracks around the ship showed that not all the bears were in hibernation yet. For a few hours around noon the sky

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filled with color, ranging from deep rosy red, through every shade of pink and blue, to cold blue-black over the mountains to the north. Early afternoon found More and Brown on deck, checking the accumulation of ice on spars and shrouds. It wasn't a major problem in these waters—annual precipitation was as low as in the Sahara desert—but a routine check had to be made. They started with the spanker boom and worked for'ard, Brown flashing beams from his lantern across the furled canvas overhead. Some aurora was flickering in the sky to the north.

They were moving from the foremast to the bowsprit when the shooting star appeared. A golden fireball, it was bigger and moving more slowly than any meteor More had seen before. It came into being in the north, not far from the horizon, and drew its ruler-straight trail up the sky towards the zenith. Both men sighed involuntarily as it faded, leaving the dispersing trail at rest for a second—then it lit up again, passing over the ship now, bright enough to throw shadows on the deck.

"I never saw that happen before!" More exclaimed, as it was hidden by the fore topgallant. He and Brown started aft to follow it, catching glimpses between the sails as the meteor flared south.

They were already amidships, negotiating the remaining deck cargo, when More realized they were being followed. Someone had come out of the fo'c'sle and was following them aft. "See who that is behind us, Brown!" More ordered, and kept going. He didn't need a lantern to find his way about *Resolute*'s deck, and he kept his eyes on that extraordinary star.

Ahead of him, a hatch shot open. More stopped dead, expecting trouble—he felt matters were coming to a head. But Dr. Hayes and the two girls sprang out. Coming from the light below they didn't see him, but rushed to the stern to watch the meteor. "Look at that!" More heard Diana cry in wonder.

There had been no alarm on deck, no shouting, and the shooting star itself made no sound. How had the Americans known it was there? On an impulse he couldn't justify, More slipped down the hatch into the light. The Hayeses' cabin, which had earlier been his own, stood open. More opened up his heavy clothes and stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

This was precisely the offense for which the Plymouth seaman had been flogged, he realized as he drew off his gloves. In the same moment he saw the book, lying open on the table.

The chapter title, printed at the top of the pages, was "In the Ice." The three critical passages were printed in italics, so his eye was drawn to them at once. The first two were the *Resolute*'s log entries for the flying machine mirages—and the third, incredibly, for today's date and this very time, read:

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"3h.05m.. A strange fireball sighted, coming from the northern sky. It was seen to be extinguished near the zenith, then to reappear as brightly as before further along its track. It proceeded into the southern sky, eventually vanishing behind the islands. All who saw it were impressed with its brilliance and its unusually slow pace across the heavens." The last words had been underlined in red ink.

How in God's name could the log entry for the incident already be printed in this book—probably in his own words, since he was Officer of the Watch? Unable to believe his eyes, More flipped to the cover. It had a protective jacket of glossy paper, more shiny than he had ever seen before. The book was *Voyage to Controversy,* by Howard T. Hayes, F.T.R.I.—Dr. Hayes himself, obviously.

Inside the cover, printed on the end papers of the book, was a map of northern Canada and the complex of islands above. A *complete* map—and despite his incredulity More knew, somehow, that the outlines were accurate. Along Lancaster Sound a broken line ran to meet a solid line; it was scarcely a surprise, by now, to find one labeled "Track of H.M.S. *Resolute,* August—September, 1850" and the other "Track of sledge expedition under Lieut. L. McLintock, 1850–51." The two met at Griffith's Island, in a large shaded rectangle marked "Disputed area of tracks—see Frontispiece."

The Frontispiece map showed the area in detail. Across it ran tracks marked "Route of the returning sledge parties, according to Lieut. McLintock"; "Routes of search parties under Capt. Austin, Lieut. More, Lieut. Barnes"; and "Actual route of the sledge parties, as suggested by Capt. Austin." All these, More realized with a new and dream-like acceptance, were next year's events. Numbly, he turned back to the log entries and on to the end of the chapter.

"Throughout the last fifty miles, from where he first found open water, McLintock was expecting the ships to meet him. The party pressed on, across the melted pools and treacherous hummocks; skirting the dangerous edges of the pack; wet through and exhausted, dragging their sick and injured colleagues. In due course they struck across to the islands, and rounded the cape from which they last saw the winter anchorage. The ships were not there; and at that moment, effectively, began one of the most famous trials in naval history."

The next chapter was entitled "What Really Happened?" With a kind of desperation, More read on.

"Austin's 'bare acquittal' and the return of his sword could not satisfy the English public. In their opinion, the crew's testimony supporting Austin was mere evidence of conspiracy. The great explorer had basely deserted his professional rival, abandoning many of his own sailors to . . ." Behind him, More heard the cabin door open and close.

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Diana Hayes stood there, shedding her gloves and opening her jacket as he had done before. She barely glanced at the open book in his hands. Now, her expression said plainly, the need for pretense was past. She moved towards him with assurance, her gaze so compelling that any resistance he might offer sank without trace. He knew, intellectually, that he should brandish the book and demand an explanation, but this short, dark-haired girl had him in thrall. She came up to tiptoes, hung one arm about his neck and fastened her lips to his.

Overwhelmed, More crushed her to him, appalled by the strength of the desire he had been suppressing for so long. He had to put an immediate stop to this, present the incredible evidence of the book to Captain Austin, but he couldn't find strength to act. Her hand came down past his waist, down to take him where he lived as she took a half-step to the side, hooking one leg around his. "Stop it . . . let go," he whispered, but failed to disengage her hand. His knuckles brushed her bare leg where somehow the seam of her skirt had parted, and helplessly he took hold, battening his lips over hers again. . . .

"Mr. More!"

Slowly and with infinite reluctance More released her, turning to the men in the doorway. If the captain's interruption had been two minutes later it would have been much harder to regain any kind of decorum. Behind her father, where the captain couldn't see her, Evelyn Hayes had momentarily shed her cover: her expression was pure glee, without malice, at Diana's frustration.

"One law for the men and another for the officers, Mr. More?"

More swallowed hard and reached for the book. He had let it fall to the table—

Gone. The only time Diana could possibly have snatched it was just a second ago, as More faced Hayes and the captain. It must now be in one of her hands, both thrust deep into the pockets of her jacket. Her expression was as clear as "England expects . . .": if he spoke, it would be a double betrayal. Hell would have no fury like *this* woman scorned, he suspected; her anger might put a rope around his neck.

Dr. Hayes's expression was grim, but otherwise unreadable. How far will he go to preserve his secret, thought More—will he see me discredited, or even hanged? Had he and Diana arranged this, seeing him enter the cabin? Determination came to him—he would *not* be used. It was his duty to speak.

At that precise moment there was an extraordinary sensation underfoot, as if the outside pressure had suddenly forced the ship up out of the pack. A cry of amazement rang out on deck, and—utterly impossible—a beam of sunlight stabbed down through the open hatch, framing Evelyn's head in brilliant gold against the gloom of the passage.

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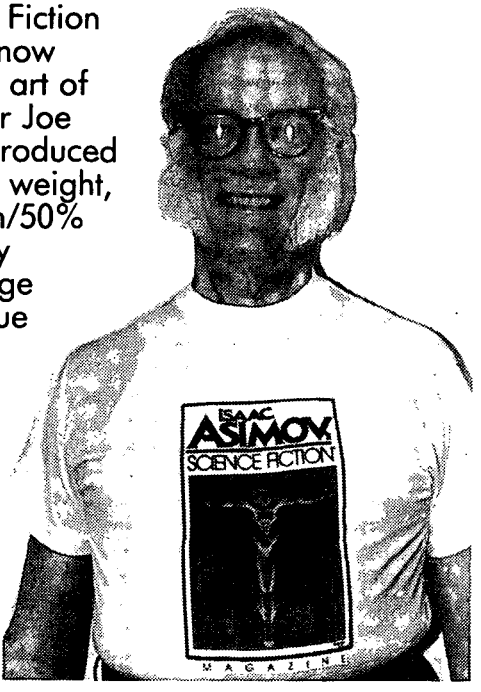

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There was a rush of footsteps overhead, and Brown appeared silhouetted in the hatchway. "Captain, sir! Captain Austin!" Fear and incredulity rang in his voice.

"Here I am, Brown. Gangway, there!" Austin led the rush to the deck. More brought up the rear, ushering Diana ahead. Like the others he emerged blinking, first at the sunlight, then with disbelief. Minutes before the *Resolute* had been fast in the Arctic ice, buried in the gloom of winter—now she sat in the middle of a city square, her black hull sunk into its smooth surface. Sunlit buildings towered around her.

For the rest of his life, More remembered and profited by the captain's example at that moment. Faced with the unexpected, it is better to give an order, *any* order, than to allow fear and surprise to paralyze one's command; but Austin swept the scene once with his eyes and gave the one order involving *all* the crew, and entirely appropriate:

"Clear for action! Pipe to quarters!"

For every man aboard, reflexes and training took over. The *Resolute* wasn't a man-o'-war and there wasn't a great deal to be done, but it galvanized everyone into action despite the spectacle over the side. The pipes shrilled along the ship, bo'sun's mates bawled "All hands on deck!" and the crew came tumbling up out of the hatches, pulling on the cold-weather gear they no longer needed. "Issue small arms!" the captain ordered, and pistols and cutlasses appeared like magic. The marines came clattering up, muskets at the ready, to fall in by the mainmast.

"Guns cleared for action, sir," the breathless gunner's mate reported.

"Load, and run out," Austin snapped. In another minute, the *Resolute*'s teeth were fully shown.

A short pause ensued, time to take in details of their new surroundings. The city square around them was set with flower beds and statues. Some of the buildings around seemed modern, but their stone was weathered and overlaid with smoke deposits. Others defied belief: the tallest in view, towering over closer buildings, seemed to be faced entirely with metal and glass. The *Resolute*'s prow pointed directly to a low structure, mainly wood and glass, on the edge of the square. A sign along its roof said "Information Centre."

Dr. Hayes pointed it out. "I'd say, sir, from the spelling of 'Center,' that we're in your country somewhere."

Austin gave him a look that spoke volumes. "God forbid," was his only comment, as he turned to survey the square.

There weren't many people about, but the passers-by were reacting to the *Resolute*'s appearance in their city. People were streaming towards the ship from all directions, most of them young. There were girls, More realized, dressed like Diana in her sailor's costume, others in astonish-

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ingly short skirts, and men in styles he just couldn't believe. It's an illusion, or a nightmare, he thought.

"Hey man," one apparition shouted, "can we come aboard?"

"Stand by to repel boarders," snapped the captain. The marines moved smartly to the rails.

"We want to come aboard!" The youngsters were shouting and clapping, pressing around the ship, and the crowd was swiftly growing. Some of the seamen were wavering. "Stand fast, all hands!" bellowed Austin.

On the starboard side, a youth was boosted up by his friends to catch the ship's rail. A quartermaster aimed a blow at him with a belaying pin and the fellow plunged back into the crowd. At almost the same moment a cutlass flashed in the bows as an A.B. slashed at someone clinging to the bowsprit. Waves of anger spread through the crowd, good humor evaporating like the frost off the shrouds.

"A musket volley over their heads," Austin called to the sergeant of marines. The guns banged raggedly, producing not the expected rout, but a fresh wave of laughter followed by cheering.

"They think we're some kind of entertainment, sir!" More exclaimed, his sanity under strain.

"We'll disabuse 'em of the notion, Mr. More. Gunner's mate—a ball at that statue over there!"

With the ship firmly fixed, at that range the ball couldn't possibly miss. Without the usual noises of wind and sea the cannon's crack was deafening, echoing back from the surrounding buildings. The ball split the statue and rebounded towards the "Information Centre," from which came a great crash of breaking glass. The crowd scattered, screaming; several of them had been injured by splinters flying from the statue. In less than a minute the square was empty. Several figures could still be seen fleeing down the side streets.

"That's better," said the captain. "Stand by, all hands."

"Shall we remove jackets and furs, sir?" More asked. They seemed to be in a hot summer's morning, and even with his own jacket open More was sweating freely.

"I think not, Mr. More. All this may be some deadly hallucination, like the flying machines we saw before. If we expose ourselves to the Arctic night, thinking it's magically become the English summer, maybe we'll join Franklin on the list of missing ships. Meantime, Mr. More, you'll take a party below and check for damage. If these events are real and we suddenly return to the Arctic, I don't want to learn at that moment that our timbers are smashed below the waterline." Looking over the side they could see that, despite the impression that the ship had been lifted, the paving of the square was no further below the white riband than the ice had been before.

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The ship was intact all the way to her keel, as far as he could determine. It was strange to be below with no sound of water coming through the hull, not even the cracks and groans of the ice. Stranger still the new noises, which could only be subterranean happenings in the city itself. Every few minutes there came a deep, eerie rumbling, as if some great machine were passing near them through the earth.

Going through the 'tweendecks, strangely deserted and quiet as if the ship were in drydock, he saw Diana Hayes coming to meet him. She was projecting the same irresistible attraction as before, though a new and grimmer determination had been added. He moved towards her and was halted as she caught him at the waist, possessively, but keeping him at arm's length.

"Now listen, sailor boy." And listen he did, mesmerized, despite the difference in their heights. "I wouldn't have come on to you like that if I hadn't wanted to. I was glad of the chance to do something I'd wanted to do since I came aboard. If I had the chance I would go all the way with you, without shame and guilt—not like the girls of your time. But that is the point: I'm not from your time. I'm from the late twentieth century, your future—you could be my great-grandfather, though I don't think so . . . and I shall have to go back there. It's not so much because of my work, though that means a lot to me, but simply that I can't stay here. The aliens are disturbing time enough as it is—my 'father' will tell you—" More noticed the way she said "father" and was suddenly jealous. "Now something much more serious has happened. It may even be our fault, and that's what I have to find out. It may even mean that we *can't* return to the future, and if not, then you're mine, Lieutenant." Her hands clenched without warning, making him catch his breath. "Now we both have our duty to do—go to it!"

She turned and left him, not looking back. God, what a handful she would be, literally and figuratively. What kind of world could it be, where a respectable young woman—assuming that she *was* respectable—could act like that?

A world with books describing events still to happen; where men dressed like scarecrows and women like harlots; a world of glass and metal buildings. . . . "I'm from the late twentieth century," she had said, while he stood nodding like a fool. *Is that where we are now?*

He arrived on deck not comprehending that wild thought, but convinced of the urgency of sharing it with the captain. He found Austin in no mood to receive wild thoughts—Dr. Hayes had already assailed him with too many.

". . . alternate worlds, Doctor, alternate poppycock. I ask you to account for a crisis which has overtaken the ship and you give me metaphysical drivel about how a cat can be alive and not alive at the same time. I'm

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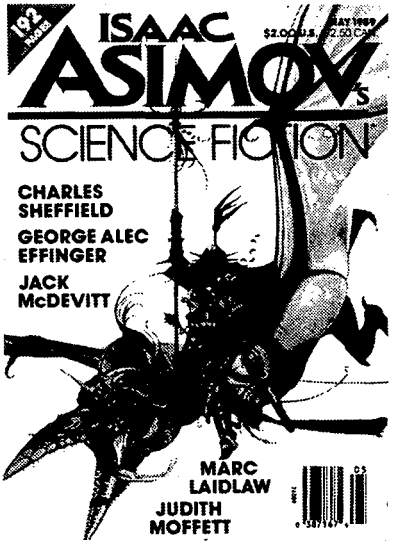

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not a man to trifle with, Dr. Hayes: there's only one cat of consequence aboard this ship, and that one's not in a box, it's in a bag—from which it has been out once already on this voyage, in an incident concerning you. You know more than you're saying, sir, and I mean to have it from you. Who are those Plymouth men, and why are they not at their posts now?"

Hayes began to reply, though, from the helpless spreading of his hands, it would not have been an answer to please Austin. In the quiet, however, the cry of the lookout drowned him out.

"Unknown vessel on the port bow!"

It wasn't exactly a *vessel,* though More would have been equally stumped for the right word. It was some kind of enclosed carriage, painted black and white, and apparently self-propelled: there were no horses, and the throb of an engine could plainly be heard. Two uniformed men emerged from it, one carrying a curious form of speaking-trumpet.

"British police uniforms," said Hayes. "Taken with the other clues around us, Captain, I would say the year here is somewhere in the nineteen-eighties. We have swung to within twenty years of my own time."

"Welcome home," said Austin, dismissing the absurdity. "Ahoy there! Stand where you are, that's close enough."

The amplified reply boomed eerily around the square, but its tinny overtones couldn't mask the challenge to the captain's authority. "This is Inspector Scott of the City Police. I don't know what kind of stunt this is, and since we already have several people injured and considerable damage to property, I don't care. Lay down your weapons immediately and come out here on to the square!"

Austin wouldn't entertain that. "This is Her Majesty's Ship *Resolute,* in the Arctic out of England in the year 1850. . . ." He had compromised to the extent of throwing back his fur hood, but had refused to follow Dr. Hayes and Evelyn in shedding furs altogether. "I don't know how we came here, if indeed we truly *are* here, or how soon we may return. Until I have more information, no man will enter or leave this ship!"

"Look, I don't intend to stand here and argue," shouted the Inspector. "The Special Branch are already in position, the Anti-Terrorist Squad is on the way and military assistance is on standby. Turn those cannon inboard, lay down your other weapons and surrender to my men, or the consequences will be serious!"

"*Late* 1980s," murmured Evelyn. Hayes nodded. Austin made no reply to them or to the threat, and after a moment the inspector turned on his heel. He and his companion returned to their conveyance and mechanical voices could be heard from it as it moved away. Another appeared almost at once from a side street, this one plain black and armored; it bumped

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up on to the square and smoke began to issue from it as it moved upwind of the ship.

Dr. Hayes laid a firm hand on Austin's arm. "Discourage that, Captain," he said urgently. Evidently he thought it no time for niceties and, however reluctantly, Austin took his word. "Come to bear and fire!" he roared. The bow and stern guns swiveled and spoke together; the black side of the vehicle caved in and it swerved drunkenly away from the ship, disappearing from view behind the wrecked "Information Centre."

"Just in time," said Hayes. "We're hardly in a position to withstand a gas attack." Nobody knew what he meant and Austin didn't pause to ask. "They won't take that lying down, Mr. More. Take cover from sharpshooters, there—Mister Mate, get screens up along the side of the ship!"

Austin drew Barnes aside; as they pointed out at the sun and drew diagrams in the air, More guessed they were discussing the ship's position. Scanning around, he noticed with concern black-clad figures moving from cover to cover on the surrounding roofs. Glimpsing one through the telescope, he saw that the man was armed and hooded, and began assessing how much protection the remaining deck cargo would afford.

"I've been here before," said Evelyn Hayes, behind him. "It looked different, but this is Glasgow, Scotland, I believe." More was about to order her below but he noticed that she pronounced "Glasgow" correctly, unlike so many Americans, and paused in case she had valuable information. "If you turn your glass on that statue there, Lieutenant, I think you'll find it's Queen Victoria."

More looked, and began to explode in indignation before partial comprehension and shock took over. "Queen Victoria?—that old . . . *old* . . ."

He turned to face her, and she nodded. "You're getting it, Lieutenant. Better convince the captain that it's true."

"And then what?" asked More. A helpless look crossed Evelyn's face, but before she could answer a strange grinding noise began, overlaid by the sound of an engine much louder than the police carriages'. The noise grew in volume, echoing in the silent square, and into view came a vehicle olive-green in color, and as heavily armored as *Resolute* herself was against the ice. It was propelled, apparently, by metal belts underneath it, doing considerable damage to the roadway—but by far the worst thing about it was the extraordinary cannon mounted on top, swinging with nightmare ease to bear on the ship.

"That's what's known as a tank, Captain," Hayes confided, keeping his voice down. "Your cannon will make little impression on that steel armor, I'm afraid. And their own shells are packed with explosives—just a few of them will tear this wooden ship apart."

Austin studied it, past the shields they had put up. "Where's the entrance to it—is that a hatch in the roof?"

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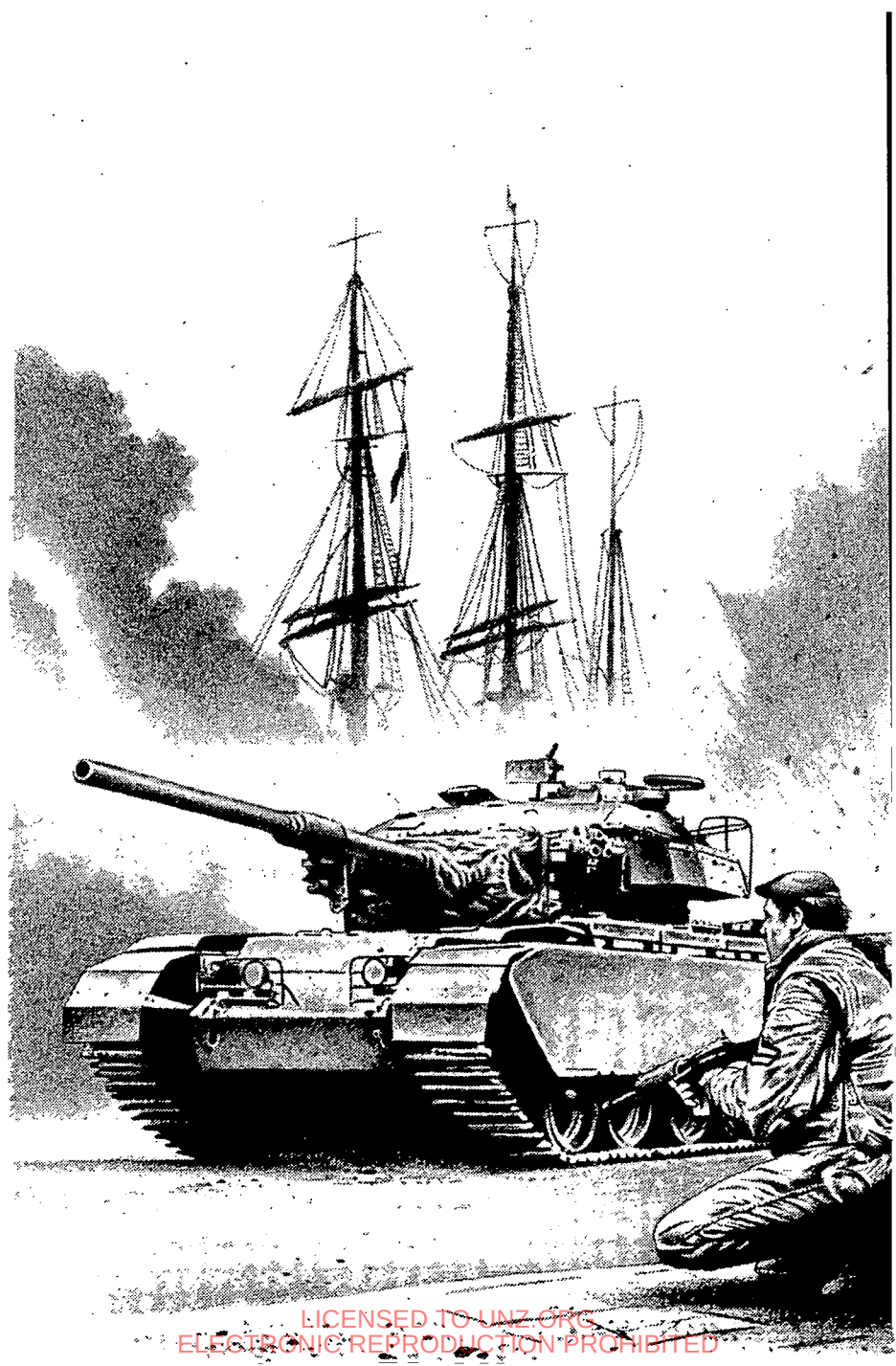

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A man wearing a metal helmet had put his head through the opening. An inhuman voice, mechanical and deafening, rang across the square.

"The city center has been placed under martial law. Whatever the explanation, your guns are to be turned over to the Army without delay. In your own terms, you must strike your ensign. You have five minutes to surrender: otherwise we shall disable your cannon with our own fire."

The captain looked even more grim. "We'll have to risk leaving the ship," he said at last. "Mr. More, take five men and capture that machine. If you can't get at the men inside it, should they close the hatch, be sure you spike that gun before you return here. We'll try to give you cover against their snipers—"

Hayes was going to raise some objection, but there was no need for it. The city faded as if it were mirage after all, with a sensation as if the ship had come off the top of a great wave. A moment later the deck tilted: this time the ship really was sliding off a wave-crest. The *Resolute* was back in open water—and back in the Arctic, to judge by the sudden cold in the wind.

Again the captain was first to react. "*Make sail!* Get some way on her, bring her round to catch the wind. Man the lead, and get someone with keen eyes to the main-top—" His eye lit on the third lieutenant, as furious activity broke out. "Your sextant, Mr. Barnes, where the devil are we?" Must I tell everyone his job, his tone said plainly. Barnes vanished for the instruments.

More helped Evelyn into her jacket, then shrugged into his own. The sun was still in the sky, though appreciably nearer the horizon. They were in Barrow Strait again, he guessed, but obviously not in winter. Barnes was going to find his calculations difficult, with his chronometer time meaningless and no date to look up in the *Nautical Almanac*.

"We are at sea now, Dr. Hayes, and it appears to be summer. Those are kitty-wake and ivory-gulls over the water, are they not?" Austin's tone suggested that a simple answer even to that might be too much to hope for. "Is the ship safe for the moment, do you suppose?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose so—for the moment."

"Which is just one among an infinity of possible moments, you'd have me believe—whatever it may mean. We'll get to the bottom of what's happened now, if you don't mind—in my cabin, out of this wind. You may as well come, too, Miss Hayes: of the three of you, you seem to be the only one with a sensible head on your shoulders."

Evelyn gave him a look that seemed strangely out of character, as if she resented the compliment, but she allowed the captain to usher her below. More followed, though not ordered to do so. Though he couldn't see the full picture, he knew that he had several of the vital details.

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Austin, however, was very much in charge as they seated themselves around his table.

"You've tried to explain yourself in your own way, Dr. Hayes, and you've made a hash of it. For the moment you'll oblige me by just answering the questions I put to you, in plain English if you please. To begin with, sir, who are you? And perhaps more importantly, *what* are you? You're like no man of science that ever I met."

"I'm not one, in the ordinary sense," said Hayes. "I am in fact a historian, though with the means of study we have at our disposal, history is more a science than an art." Austin's eye met More's and a skeptical look passed between them; it would not have occurred to either of them that history was not a science. But the point was too minor to challenge.

"My specialty is the history of your time, and I study it from the viewpoint of the late twentieth century," Hayes went on. "That is *my* time, through which I have grown and aged in the normal way, having been born a hundred years from what you call 'now.' I was born on the hundredth anniversary of your departure from England, Captain; I think that's why your story always fascinated me . . . and in the year 1998, my colleagues and I left our own time to find out for ourselves what happened to you."

"Colleagues," Austin said flatly. More guessed that he was trying to imagine Hayes as a professional associate of the troublemakers in the fo'c'stle. Hayes missed the point entirely.

"Neither of them is my daughter, Captain, as you may have guessed. The role of women is changing even in your own time. There is a woman now in Egypt, by the name of Florence Nightingale—I could tell you what she's going to do, but there's no point because you can't verify it. Worse still, some destructive impulse might make you try to prevent it, and I suspect that in some versions of history you would succeed."

"Stick to facts, please, Doctor, not what even you admit to be conjectures. Verification is just the point, is it not. Can anything you have said so far be verified, by any test I might accept?"

"I doubt it, Captain," Hayes said wearily. "All our aim was to prevent you realizing the truth about us. I could tell you things which are happening now, on the other side of the world, but you have no way to check up on them. We brought virtually nothing with us from our own time to betray what we are—though Diana had a theory, which she insisted on putting to the test, that any devices or manners which seemed strange to you would be laughed off as curiosities, or eccentricity."

The book was not evidence, More realized: it could be part of some very elaborate hoax. That Hayes didn't mention it showed its importance—and he didn't know More had seen it! I have a trump card to play, thought More, if he tries to misdirect us—we may have to summon Diana and

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demand that she produce it. Come to that, where was Diana? He hadn't seen her since the beginning of the bizarre events in the city—*events which weren't mentioned in the book. . . .*

If Austin noticed More stiffen, he didn't think it significant. " 'Curious' or 'eccentric' are not the words I'd use of those Plymouth men, Doctor. Latterly their behavior was far more strange than yours, and they failed to appear at all when we piped to quarters. Yet you speak of your expedition from the future as if they had no part of it. Who are they, and what's their interest in you?"

"I don't know," said Hayes. But in response to Austin's scowl, he went on, reluctantly: "I *believe*—and it's only a belief—that they are not of this world."

"Don't let the crew hear a word of that," said Austin, with all his authority behind the words. "What are you saying, man—that we have entertained angels unawares?"

"Not angels, Captain. Aliens. Intelligent beings from another world, or androids—creatures made by true aliens, to masquerade as humans. But creatures from some other world in space, not from some fanciful world of the supernatural."

"Fanciful worlds," mused Austin. "You come from the future, but can't prove it. They come from space, and have apparently vanished into it. We have been plucked from the ice into a locality strange enough to defy all reason, which you casually tell me is the Scotland of another time—and now we are in open water, in what is very obviously Arctic summer. You claim to know what is happening elsewhere in the world, but there's no point in telling me. But by God you'll answer me one such question, because lives are at stake and it's vital to the success of the expedition. *Have I missed the rendezvous with McLintock?"*

"You missed it last time," said Hayes.

Total silence fell in the cramped cabin. Evelyn put a restraining hand on Hayes's arm; he turned to face her. "The events we've all been through aren't in the log," he said. "This is another alternate."

"We're back into your conjectures, Doctor," Austin pointed out. "This was where you and I parted company last time, and I expect a better explanation now. On the face of it, the expression 'alternate worlds' is meaningless." He slapped his hands alternately on the table. "This world, then *that* world . . . this world, then that. You make no sense."

Hayes chuckled, though the relentless inquisition clearly had put him under strain. "It's a trick of language—usages change in a hundred years. Not alternate, then—alternative. This world *and* that, both going on in parallel."

"We're back to that damned cat in the box," said Austin, his tone threatening. "You're on dangerous ground, sir. Don't try me too far."

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Evelyn restrained Hayes again. "Let me tell it, then. The story of Schroedinger's Cat is an illustration of some extraordinary discoveries we have made about the nature of reality. You don't know what radioactive decay is, so you must take my word that it's a process which occurs randomly, but at an overall rate governed by time. If you put a cat into a box with a phial of poison, to be released by the radioactive process, then after a certain interval of time the chances that the cat was alive or dead would be exactly equal." She looked from Austin to More and back, gauging their reactions. "You can't tell without opening the box. In a sense, the cat is both dead and alive. When you open the box, if the cat is alive, your world goes on from there—but there is another world, which you cannot perceive, in which the cat is dead."

"Nonsense," said Austin, sitting back. "It's only good manners, Miss Hayes, that keeps me from using a stronger word. I cannot understand why you present this to me as if it were important. I have listened to it twice, and my patience is wearing very thin." He sat suddenly forward and stabbed a finger at Hayes across the table. "You have one chance, Doctor, and you'll make a fool of me at your peril. What the devil has this rambling about a cat to do with McLintock?"

"You missed the rendezvous," Hayes said despairingly. "You and your crew swore that you were there; McLintock and his party swore that they were there; but no meeting took place. It was one of the most famous trials of the century and is still one of the great mysteries of the sea. You suggested McLintock's navigation was faulty; historians wrangle over whether you were right. But if you were both right, and yet you missed each other, it could only be because somebody interfered. It's as if you opened the box and found the phial broken but the cat unharmed: either somebody removed the poison or somebody gave the cat an antidote."

"The 'aliens?' " said More. "Diana said they were 'disturbing time enough as it is?' "

Hayes relaxed slightly. "A paradoxical turn of phrase, when you think about it. . . . But yes, the aliens might be to blame, as I thought. You saw their flying machines, you saw a spacecraft enter the atmosphere—all the indications of a large expedition arriving, and then nothing, not even a departure. My theory is that they took over the Earth on which you made the rendezvous, leaving humanity otherwise undisturbed on the alternate one, created by their meddling, on which you missed it. They used the ship as a historical pivot—moved it in time, perhaps, from one Arctic winter to another without your realizing, and then put you back in 1851 after the rendezvous had been missed."

"But something much more spectacular has happened to us," Austin pointed out. "Are you suggesting that a *third* 'alternate' has been gen-

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erated? It must be, because we realized we had been moved . . . and we have returned far out of place. We could be anywhere—the other end of the Passage, even—and what year is it now, I'd like to know? This is outrageous, Dr. Hayes. It's plainly the result of *your* meddling—the so-called 'aliens' appear relatively innocent!"

"We don't know how they behave on the alternate Earth," said Hayes. "Do they share it with humanity, do they rule, or do they destroy us? The evidence suggests several interventions in history—they may have taken Earth away from us several times." Having gained an advantage with that sobering thought, he pressed on. "Besides, I don't think we're responsible for the new track; at least, not directly. There's a cat in a box that we have still to open."

Austin sighed. "With reluctance, sir, I ask you—what do you mean by that?"

"At the moment when we returned to the Arctic, Captain, you were sending Lieutenant More off the ship to attack the tank. Until you took that decision, the unresolved question was whether people would be allowed on or off the ship, perhaps thereby 'anchoring' it in the future. When you took that decision, you were in effect about to open Schroedinger's box—and the result, as it seems, was to displace us from the future and return us to the Arctic."

Hayes paused, but Austin was baffled. More saw the point, however, more clearly than Hayes himself anticipated. "And with your talk of swings and pivots, Doctor, the implication is that the starting point of the swing might also have involved me."

"We had just found you in what you would term a compromising situation—"

"More compromising to you, sir, if the truth be told. The unresolved question of *that* moment, on which I had in fact then taken my decision, was whether or not to reveal the existence of your book entitled *Voyage to Controversy*."

Hayes was taken aback; Austin obviously about to demand explanation, More pressed on. "It's a book, sir, written by Dr. Hayes in his future persona, which describes our voyage in detail—down to the very fireball which Brown and I saw only minutes before the crisis—and goes on to relate how we missed the rendezvous with Lieutenant McLintock, how you were court-martialed, and I don't know what else. What Dr. Hayes would describe as 'trying to open the box' was, presumably, my decision to tell you about the book, despite Miss Hayes's . . . er . . . powerful counter- persuasion."

"Then I'll see it now," Austin replied firmly. "Dr. Hayes, I have a scientific background, as any serious explorer must have, but if there's anything at all to substantiate your fantastic story then I have a right

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to see it. As things stand at present there's only one element in my experience which strikes a chord with it, and that's the feeling every seaman knows in mid-ocean—especially in the Arctic—that he and his shipmates are in a different world, occupied by themselves alone."

"It's called 'breakoff phenomenon,' " said Evelyn Hayes. "Pilots experience it at great altitudes, and space travelers, too—human ones, I mean—far out on journeys to the Moon or the planets."

"Fascinating," said Austin. "I've often regretted the fact—and said as much to my officers—that the great age of exploration seemed to be ending, with only the Poles still to reach. And now you lay all of this before me . . . but first I must insist that you lay this remarkable book before me. Now, if you please."

"Who has it?" asked More. Dr. Hayes and Evelyn looked blank. "Miss Diana had it from me. Where is she now?"

"I've been wondering that," said Evelyn. "I haven't seen her since we materialized in the city."

"Neither have I," said Hayes, alarmed. "She couldn't have left the ship. . . ?"

"I don't think so," More interrupted. "I met her below decks, going for'ard. She said she had her duty to do; some research for you, I assumed."

"She went to check on the aliens, the idiot!" cried Hayes. "She said nothing to anyone about it. . . . Captain, they must still be somewhere aboard."

"There's been no time to search," Austin agreed, "but we'll have it done now, if Brown doesn't already have it in hand. Come with me, Mr. More."

"I can hear that ship again," said Evelyn Hayes.

Everyone froze—More and Austin because they didn't know what she meant. But in a moment they too heard the distinctive drone of the flying machine which had passed the *Resolute* in the fog, weeks before. Another moment brought the sound of a scuffle on the planking overhead, and the sound of a body falling to the deck. The motion of the ship changed sharply as the wheel was thrown over.

This time More was first up out of the hatch. As he reached the deck the ship came up into the eye of the wind and hung there in irons, the banging of the sails drowning out the noise of the approaching flying machine. On the poop the Plymouth seamen were again gathered in their strange inward-facing circle, including the man who now had the wheel. The helmsman lay unconscious at his feet. And within the circle Diana Hayes stood motionless, as if mesmerized, staring towards the man who now controlled the ship. None of them wore furs, despite the wind.

More's reaction was virtually instinctive. The aliens, or androids, or whatever they were, had waited until the crew stood down from action

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stations before making their move. But More still had his pistol, whose drawing he could not afterwards recall; he raised it, sighted and fired, with a clear shot at the usurper of the wheel. The man released the spokes and fell back a step, and as the circle was broken Diana came out of her trance.

As More had to admit afterwards, he had no idea how she would react; but he would have made a wager that neither a scream nor a faint would be on the agenda. What did happen was that she lunged after the wounded man, and, bringing her cupped hands over her head in a blow that looked curiously oriental, smashed her captor of a moment before in the solar plexus. The backward step became a career and the seaman vanished head-first over the taffrail. To More's astonishment the other men of the clique at once ran aft in two lines, passing to either side of Diana and the wheel to dive like porpoises over the rail.

The flying machine at once veered towards them, coming into plain sight from behind the sails. It resembled a great whirring insect, with a glowing golden body and windows like high-placed bulbous eyes. As it dropped astern of the *Resolute,* the sails filled with a final crack and the ship fell off on to the port tack, heeling over as the wind gained control and forced her around. A seaman—a true one—rushed aft to catch the wheel at the null point in its deadly spin.

"Man overboard!" roared Austin. "Stand by to come about—"

"Don't do that, Captain!" Hayes seized Austin's arm once more. "Keep going—put on more sail, if you can!"

"Monstrous, Doctor! No man can live for more than minutes in Arctic water—"

"Whatever else they are, they're not men. We still don't know whether they're aliens or living machines, but my money's on the latter. But what we *do* know is far too much—we must escape or they'll destroy us. There's a squall coming and it'll give us cover to dodge; we must hope that when the machine is fully loaded it won't have enough fuel to search for us. But above all, Captain, now that we know what we know *we must get away.*"

It was very nearly one challenge too many, but after a moment Austin gave way. He snapped the necessary orders to Brown, whose bellows brought the crew back on deck, back to action stations, and turned the ship towards the cover of the approaching squall. The flying machine, picking up the swimmers far astern, was already being hidden by the onrushing mist.

"Now that we know what we know?" Austin repeated, as the sun disappeared and the wind rose. "We know perilous little, Doctor, or so it seemed only minutes ago."

"We already knew that we were on a new time-track," said Hayes.

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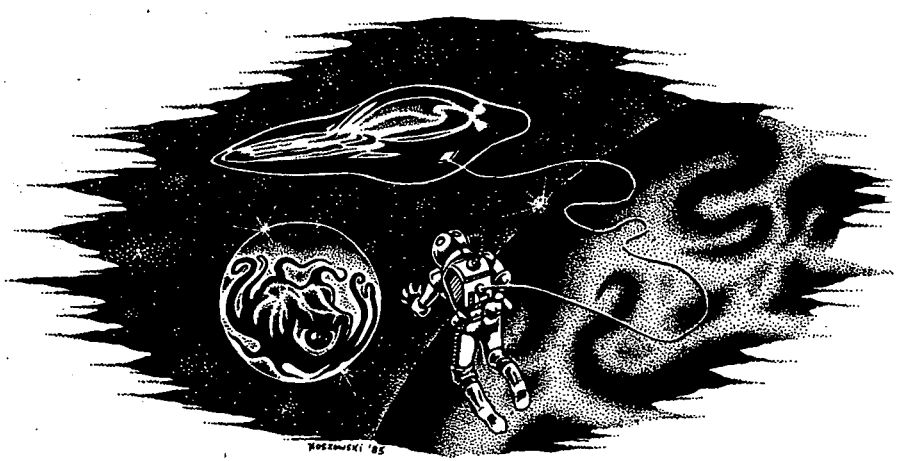
"But now we know something much more important: *we are on the one occupied by the aliens.* They do not have a time-track in which you made the rendezvous with McLintock; that version of history may have been wiped out altogether. But in *this* world, we are here—and they are here—and we all *know* about one another. Unless their plans for mankind are wholly beneficial, the whole ship and the five of us here in particular are a great threat to them. We must alert your government, and mine, and all the rest . . ."

"And it falls to me to do this, while I face court-martial for deserting McLintock," Austin added. "I consider myself entitled to your full support, Dr. Hayes, when we return to England—and it will be England first, let me assure you."

"You shall have it, sir," Hayes promised. "But things in England may not be as you suppose. We are in the Arctic, and perhaps in 1851, but not the 1851 of my past—not the 1851 of my book. Many other things may be different. The whole world is unknown, Captain; we can count on nothing that we used to know."

"Our time machine may not be there," said Diana to More. "Even if it is, it will be a long time if ever before we get back to it. The captain gets back the world of mystery that he longed for, but we may all of us get what we most want." She seized his arm and squeezed it, much to More's embarrassment; but the captain didn't notice the breach of decorum on his quarter-deck. He was gazing out over the cold sea, his mind ranging the infinite vistas of exploration beyond. ●



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GALILEO'S BLINDNESS

Unlike Milton, who had been
blind in his heart for years
to the eclipsed souls of his own
children and wives,
too penurious for spiritual spectacles,
seeing them only as scribes for his inkings,
blind, maybe out of fright for
killing King Charles,

Galileo
went blind from too much light,
examining our neighbor star,
looking for sunspots like ink spattered on a blazing disk,
tired of sublunary stuff;
just as people as they grow wise
gradually die,
we learn something
and it breaks the best part of us,
even as we grow nearer perfect
ripeness.

Galileo did not lose sight suddenly,
but much later, by degrees,
as if he had seen
as much as he had to,
though perhaps, he thought,
not nearly enough.

—Mary A. Turzillo

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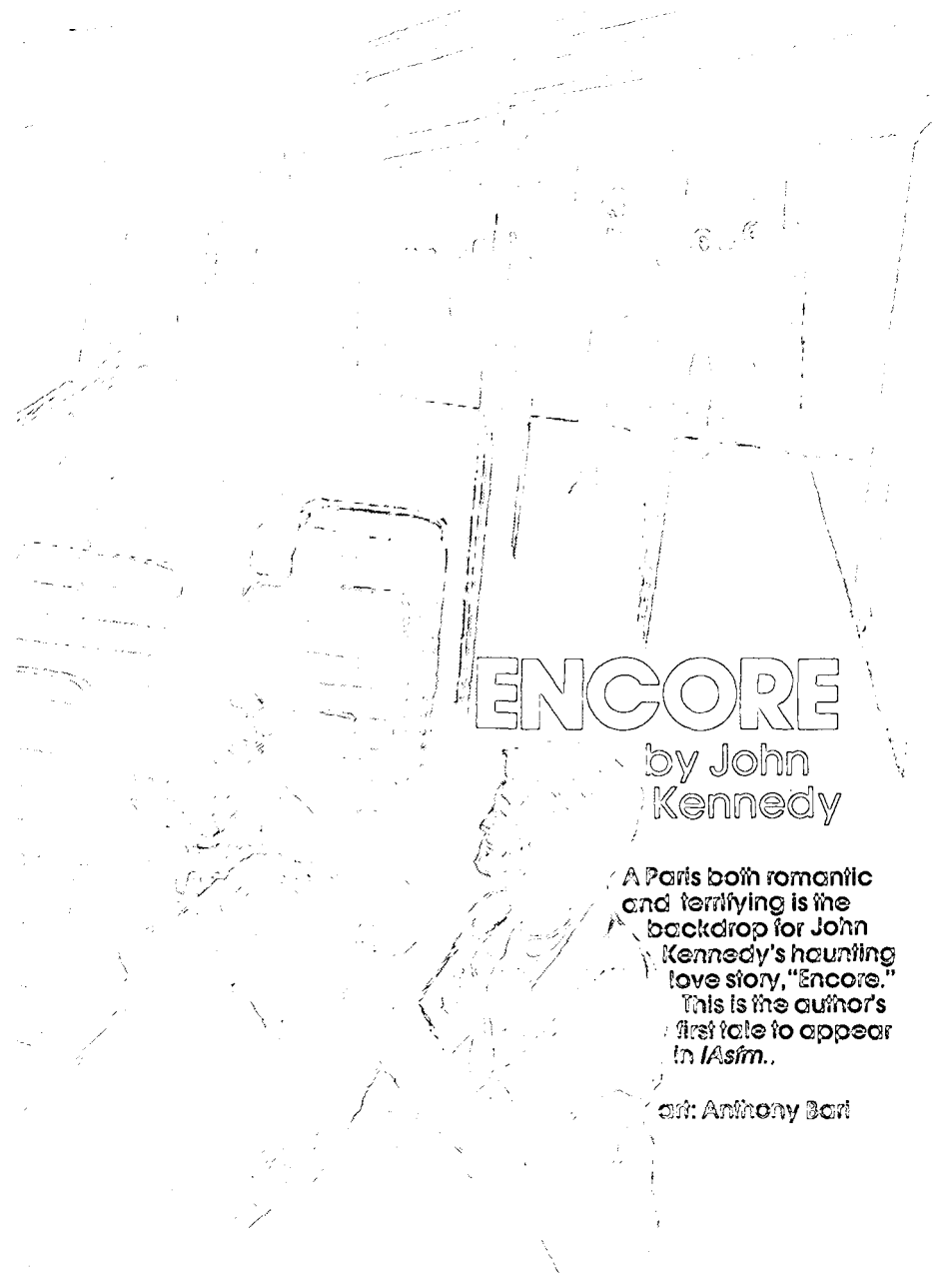

ENCORE

by John Kennedy

A Paris both romantic and terrifying is the backdrop for John Kennedy's haunting love story, "Encore." This is the author's first tale to appear in *IAsfm.*.

art: Anthony Bart

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It was late and he was lost, but he didn't care. It was his third night in Paris and he was in love with the city. The streets were full of people still enjoying the first rush of spring and he'd been walking, watching them, listening to the language he'd studied in high school but had mostly forgotten.

He walked through the Jardin de l'Intendant and soon found himself outside the Métro St. François Xavier. He looked at the map and traced the route that would take him to his hotel on the edge of the Latin Quarter.

He went down the stairs and stuck his ticket in the machine that admitted him to the platform. The train was already there and he just managed to board it before the doors slid shut and it lurched into motion.

He stumbled and caught the overhead rail, bumping into a young woman seated close to the door. She dropped her book and he retrieved it for her.

"*Merci,*" she said.

"*De rien.*" He looked into her face. She had an open, friendly smile, short black hair, green eyes. She was wearing an old army jacket and faded blue jeans. She looked twenty-two, twenty-three at the most. He smiled back. "*Je m'appelle* David Villand."

Her smile broadened slightly. "Nicole Darmon. Nikki."

He stuck out his hand. "*Enchanté.*" Her hand was warm and strong. He stood there with her hand in his and tried to think of something to say, his knowledge of French running out of his head like sand from a broken hourglass. "Uh, *je* . . . Nuts!"

"Pardon?"

He shrugged. "Sorry, I don't really—"

"You are American?"

"Yes, uh, *oui*, oh. You speak English."

She nodded and slid over in the seat. He sat next to her. For the first time in years, he felt unsure of what to say. He suddenly felt fifteen again. They looked at each other and she looked away for a moment and they both laughed. He realized she felt the same way.

He looked at her book. It was a well-used text on Greek city-states. "Are you a student?"

"Yes. I am doing graduate work in archeology."

"I thought school was over. Why are you still reading textbooks?"

She grinned. "The term was over two weeks ago, but I am going to a . . . what do you call it? A dig. Do you understand 'dig'? In Greece. *En juillet*, in July."

They kept talking and missed his stop, and then hers. They ended up in the Latin Quarter. Despite the hour, the streets were filled with students and tourists.

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They spent a few hours drinking coffee at a sidewalk café, and more time in a small jazz club on the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

He told her that he was taking a much-needed holiday after completing his first year of graduate school at U.C.L.A. He had come to France to visit relatives he had never met.

He found out that she liked sweet German wines, pizza, tight jeans, and heavy metal rock.

After the cafes and clubs closed, they walked. When a brief rain shower forced them to take shelter in a narrow doorway, he slipped his arms around her and they kissed for the first time.

The sun was just coming up when they reached her apartment building just off the Rue Lhomond. They rode the lift up the center of the stairwell to the fourth floor. Her small apartment was crowded with books, plants, records, and comfortable old furniture.

Nikki led him into the room, dropping her books on a cluttered table. She introduced him to her cats, Marcus Aurelius and Napoleon, and started picking up clothes from the chairs and floor. She laughed. "Messy, no?"

He nodded, smiling, thinking about her mouth, and the taste of her kisses.

"Would you like something to eat?" she asked.

David nodded again and laughed. She looked at him, a smile pulling at her lips. Her laugh was deep, husky. She dropped the clothes onto the floor and led him into a tiny room next to the kitchen.

The double bed almost filled the little room. She pulled the shutters closed, making the room dim, and then she walked into his embrace. They undressed each other and climbed into bed. The sheets were blue and very cool.

For the next three days, except to visit the toilet or get food from the kitchen, they rarely climbed out of bed.

In a week, David knew that he loved her and that she loved him. They loved each other with an intensity that was frightening, considering how short the time they had known each other.

He called his relatives in Rouen and told them, through Nikki, that he wouldn't be up to see them for another couple of weeks. He had no intention of letting Nikki out of his sight.

During his second week in Paris, they started getting out more often. Most of the time they walked, and Nikki showed him the sights that most tourists never see—the small streets and courtyards off the main boulevards, little cafés, clubs, art galleries, and tiny, hidden gardens and parks. She gave him lessons in French, usually in bed, confirming her theory that "the best dictionary is the horizontal dictionary."

They went to a Laurel and Hardy festival at a small art cinema in the

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Latin Quarter. After the films they ran into some friends of Nikki's, students at the École National de Photographie et Cinéma. They all ended up in a small café discussing politics and art and film until dawn.

The days and nights streaked by in a sensuous blur. Near the end of June, she asked him if he would go to Greece with her. He agreed without hesitation. They spent a week making plans for the trip. He called his relatives in Rouen and told them he probably wouldn't make it.

He called his father in St. Louis and told him about Nikki and his decision to go to Greece. His father was not happy.

"What about school?" his father asked. The trans-Atlantic connection was poor; it sounded as if they were shouting through a static-filled pipe.

"I don't know, Dad. I'm not sure what I'm going to do." He tried to find the words to describe his feelings, but he couldn't explain it. He realized that he had no intention of ever leaving Nikki. He didn't know how he'd arrange it, but he knew it with a certainty that bordered on obsession.

For a while there was only the click of relays and a soft hissing sound. Then, "I'm sorry, Dad. I'll call you," and he hung up.

David found it hard to sleep that night. He knew he had disappointed his father, but he'd had no choice. No, he thought, that's not true. Nikki was his choice. He didn't know where it would lead, but he'd made it.

Despite the heat, Nikki's body pressed against him, her head on his shoulder. The candle flame on the dresser flickered in a faint breeze. In the soft light, her skin glistened with sweat. She shifted slightly and sighed.

He slid his hand down the length of her back to her hip, overwhelmed by the warmth and smoothness of her skin. She laughed, her voice husky with sleep, and lifted her head. She pressed her lips against his.

David wasn't sure he'd ever go home again, or that he wanted to.

Three days before they were to leave for Greece, David and Nikki attended a friend's birthday party. Almost sixty people showed up, and they soon spilled out of the tiny flat into the courtyard.

It was a little after three A.M. when Nikki wanted to leave. She had the gleam in her eyes that David knew so well. They said goodbye to their host and headed home. As they walked the quiet streets, they were oblivious to anything but themselves.

On the Rue Mouffetard, they found their way blocked as five young men in leather jackets stepped into their path. The boys pulled knives and backed them into a narrow courtyard. David felt a rush of fear and then anger and he pushed Nikki behind him. His muscles tensed and he wished he had done more than just read about martial arts. Nikki grabbed his arm and pulled him back. "No," she said. "Easy."

One of the boys stepped close to them. He had bright blue eyes and a

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lopsided grin. Nikki held out her purse and he took it and dropped it to the street.

With the tip of his knife he carefully, almost gently, separated David and Nikki. Two of the boys took hold of David's arms and pushed him back against the wall.

The blue-eyed boy guided Nikki into the arms of his companions. They held her while he slit the front of her dress open. The sharp blade parted the cloth with a soft whisper like the wind through leaves. The boy seemed as interested in David's reaction as he was in Nikki's body.

David twisted free and lunged forward, kicking out at the boy. The boy turned and took the blow on his hip. Still grinning, he slammed his fist into David's stomach. David sagged to his knees, struggling to get his breath. He would have fallen on his face if the other boys hadn't grabbed him and pulled him up.

The blue-eyed boy moved behind Nikki and pressed against her. He touched her face with his fingertips. She flinched and he tightened his grip, his hand over her mouth. With his other hand he held the knife against her cheek. Lightly, with the flat of the blade, he caressed her throat, then his hand moved down, between her breasts, to her belly. Nikki had a stoic expression, but David could see her muscles tighten.

The boy put the tip of the blade right against the skin close to Nikki's left hip and, his eyes on David, with one quick thrust, pushed the blade in to the hilt. Nikki screamed once, a muffled, plaintive explosion of pain and terror, and the boy pulled the blade up the front of her body until it struck her ribs.

With a roar that hurt his throat, David lunged forward, tearing free from the two who held him. The blue-eyed boy pushed Nikki away, stepped back, spun around, and lifted his foot in a high kick. The boot struck David in the side of the head and he fell back against the wall. He slipped to the pavement, stunned. He heard the sharp clicks of their steps as they walked away. Their bootheels struck a shower of quickly fading blue-white sparks.

He lifted himself to his elbows and shook his head. Nikki was about a yard away, on her back, barely breathing. He pulled himself up and knelt next to her, in her blood. The front of her body was ruined, split open.

David moaned softly as he brushed the hair off her forehead. His body felt as if it had been wrapped in red-hot wire. He looked around. Lights had come on in a second-story flat. He couldn't remember the French word for help.

He leaned over her and her eyes opened and focused on him. "David," she whispered. "*Merde! J'ai froid.*" She winced and her body stiffened.

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Her eyes changed, and the light in them faded, like the moon obscured by clouds. Slowly, her body relaxed.

The police came eventually. They took him to a hospital and patched up his cuts and bruises. Later, they took him to a nearby police station and questioned him in a small white room that smelled of fresh paint. An efficient pair of police investigators took his statement and descriptions and, just before dawn, drove him home—to Nikki's apartment.

He stood just inside the shadow-filled apartment. None of the dark shapes made sense to him. What had been, only hours before, a place of comfort and sanctuary now seemed alien and sinister.

His thoughts were fragmented, incomplete. His body felt heavy, but empty, as if something vital had been spilled out of it.

Slowly, as if moving through a thick, clinging fluid, he walked into the bathroom. The blue glow from the skylight filled the narrow room with a pale coolness. He stripped and dropped his clothes on the tiles and stepped into the lion-footed tub. Automatically, he closed the curtain, adjusted the water temperature, and turned on the shower. As the water ran over him he looked down. In the pale light from above, the water looked black. He frowned and then realized it was Nikki's blood that stained the water. In a short while, the last of it swirled down the drain and the water was clear. He sat down in the tub and started to sob.

As the hours crept by, David tried to think of what he would do next. He didn't want to go home, but he couldn't stand to stay in Nikki's apartment much longer. Her clothes, her books, her records, all her possessions were filled up with her.

He tried to sleep, but found it impossible. The scent of Nikki still lingered on the sheets and pillows, but he couldn't bring himself to change them.

Finally, he stopped trying to sleep and just sat and stared out the window.

When dusk had filled the small flat with orange light and blue shadows, David was roused by a soft knocking. Slowly, he got up and opened the door.

The man in the hall held up an ID badge. "I am Inspector Rein with the Sûreté." He was a tall man, in his fifties, with gray hair. His suit was wrinkled and smelled of tobacco smoke, and he looked very tired.

David stepped out of the doorway. "Come in." He turned on a floor lamp and motioned the inspector to a chair.

David pulled up a kitchen chair and sat opposite the man. "Can I get you something? Tea?"

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"*Non, merci.* I have some photographs for you to look at." He tapped a folder he held.

David nodded and took the folder. He flipped through the pictures slowly, and once again stared into the eyes of the boy who had killed Nikki.

"This one," he said, quietly.

The man turned his head slightly, looking down at the photo. "You are sure?"

"Very sure."

"Do you know him? Have you ever seen him before the night of the attack?"

David stared at the photograph. The eyes were so familiar. He had a feeling that he *had* seen him before. It was hard to be objective about it. "I don't think so. No." He looked up. "Will you catch him?"

"Oh, yes. We will catch him." He gathered up the photos and put them back in the folder. He looked at David for a moment and then said, "How are you doing?"

David shrugged. "I'm okay."

The man was silent for a few seconds. "Can I tell you something?"

David nodded.

"Sometimes it is very hard for the survivors. They tend to feel guilt when there is no reason for it. I believe there is nothing you could have done to prevent Nikki's death."

"I think about it constantly," David said. His eyes filled with tears and he wiped at them with the back of his hand. "What if I'd tried to fight them? What if—"

The inspector put a hand on David's shoulder. "In all probability you would now be beyond guilt. You would be dead.

"There was no way to know that they intended to kill Nikki," the inspector said. "There was nothing you could have done to prevent it, I am sure."

"What do you mean? Are you saying you think the whole purpose of the attack was to kill Nikki?"

"I do not know. From your description of how it was done, it does seem that way to me. It is as if the killers knew you—or Nikki. As if they wanted to do something to hurt you. That is why I asked you if you knew them from before." He shook his head. "It is very confusing. If they knew you, it might make sense that they would do this to hurt you. But you do not know any of them."

"That's right." Or do I? David thought.

"Did Nikki appear to recognize any of them?"

"No. I don't think so."

The man sighed. "Perhaps it was simply a random act of violence. So.

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Very confusing. A puzzle." He shook his head. "I . . . I just have a feeling. I don't know."

After the man left, David felt restless. He kept seeing the boy's eyes. He needed to move, to walk—anything to get out of the apartment. He grabbed his jacket and went out into the night.

It was late and he was lost. He found himself at the Métro St. François Xavier. He went down the steps and waited for the train on a nearly deserted platform. The train pulled in and he boarded. He was walking up the aisle when the train started to move and he bumped into a young woman. She dropped her book and he picked it up and handed it to her.

"*Merci*," she said.

He looked at her and thought his head was going to explode. Nikki smiled up at him, amused, a curious look in her green eyes. "*Qu'avez-vous*?"

He struggled to catch his breath. "Nothing, it's . . . You look like someone I knew." She smiled at the old line. "*Parlez-vous anglais*?" he said.

"*Oui*. You are American?"

He nodded.

She slid over in the seat. "Sit. You do not look well."

He sat with her. His head seemed to be filled with a high-pitched buzzing sound, like a circular saw trying to cut through a hardwood knot. It didn't make sense. Part of him carried on a conversation with Nikki and part of him took a psychological step back, refusing to participate.

He was afraid that something was starting to slip, like the gears of a precision machine drenched with too much oil. He felt hollow, and his whole body was trembling.

I've gone totally 'round the bend, he thought. Absolutely insane. This has got to be a dream. Oh, *God*, she smells good! Her voice was so soft, so husky, so happy. It was all he could do to keep from crying.

He sat there with her, lost in the beauty of her and the memory of his love. If this is a dream, he thought, then don't let it end.

He stayed with her and it happened again. They walked, talked, kissed, held each other. There were times when the tightness in his chest almost choked him and once, in a dark side street, tears obscured his vision.

Again, at dawn, they ended up in her apartment. It was almost the same apartment he'd left a few hours before—only now there were no traces of him in the room. They made love and it was like the first time again only better, because now he already knew her body. What to touch, when to touch. . . .

He awoke with the taste of her on his lips. For a while he lay there, alone in the bed, remembering the dream. His sense of loss was gone and he felt calm. Napoleon climbed onto his chest and started to purr. David scratched him behind the ears and sighed. He heard the sound of dishes

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clanking in the kitchen and the cat jumped to the floor and disappeared in a yellow streak.

David rolled out of bed and went to the doorway. Nikki stood at the stove with her back to him. She was wearing a M*A*S*H tee shirt and very small blue panties.

She looked over her shoulder and smiled. "Breakfast?"

"*Oui.*" He sat at the table, still naked, and watched her move around the kitchen. He was captivated by her. He smiled as he studied her flowing walk and the gentle sway of her hips. She had a dancer's long legs and smooth grace. He was unable to speak, and he tried not to think or question.

He noticed the calendar. It was June again.

When he was a child, David had learned a trick he could play with pain. If he concentrated in just the right way, he could push the hurt outside his body. Send it to a small, locked-up place where it couldn't touch him. The reaction became automatic.

Now, as he sat there watching Nikki move through the bright morning sunlight, he knew that he was doing the same with the questions and fears that had begun to surface since he had found her again.

A new game had begun. It seemed that he was being given a second chance. He didn't understand it, but he accepted it. And he said nothing to Nikki about it.

Many things were the same. The places they went, things they saw. To David it was new and old at the same time. Some things were different. She no longer liked anchovies on her pizza (a change he could happily live with). Sometimes, she smoked small, black Algerian cigarettes, but not often.

The love they felt for each other was stronger, more intense, as if it had started at a much higher level, and had been added to what they had known before. Paris seemed to glow with an ethereal inner light. His senses had never been so acute. The touch of silk brought him to a dead halt in the Rue de Rennes one morning. They stood for hours watching the light change the colors and shapes of the rooftops. He had never felt more alive or content.

Again they went to the film festival in the Latin Quarter (Chaplin this time), met Nikki's friends and drank and talked until dawn.

The weeks flowed into July and they planned their trip to Greece. For the second time, David tried to explain his love for Nikki to his father and failed.

As the time for their departure grew closer, David began to worry about the boy with the blue eyes. Would he try it again?

His fears began to haunt his dreams. Usually the dreams started out with some benign event; a visit to a gallery, a trip to the market. But,

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no matter how they started, the dreams always ended with Nikki's death in the street.

After a really bad one, he awoke sweating, shaking, almost sick with the thought of losing her again. Beside him, Nikki rolled over and rose up on her elbows.

"David? What is wrong?"

"Nothing. A nightmare. *Cauchemar.*"

She slid her arms around him and held him. "What was it about?"

After a while he just shook his head. "I don't remember. It's gone now." He laughed. "Last time I eat *couscous aux mouton.*"

He wanted to tell her. At least a dozen times he began to tell her but, at the last moment, found himself unable to do it. This was the Dreamtime. There was a tenuous balance between shadow and substance, and he was afraid to push it too far past center, unsure of what might happen; afraid that the whole magical universe they inhabited would collapse. So, in the end, he said nothing.

Three days before they were scheduled to leave, they attended the birthday party. When Nikki wanted to leave, David tried to talk her out of it, but she was tired, and very insistent.

"All right," he said, "but let's take a taxi."

She laughed. "We could be home before a taxi could get here."

"Please," he said, "indulge me. My feet hurt."

She looked into his eyes for a few seconds and then nodded. "*D'ac.* Okay."

In the cab, David's tension receded. Finally, something had changed. He let himself relax. He *knew* that if they could get through this night, they would be safe. He slipped his arm around her shoulders and kissed her ear. She looked at him and smiled.

David paid the cab driver and he drove away, tires squealing. Hand-in-hand, David and Nikki walked into her courtyard.

The boy with the blue eyes stepped out of the darkness. The sight of him and his four friends was like a slap in the face. David's fear of the boy was lessened by his growing anger. Not again, he thought. Not this time.

When the boys pulled their knives, David grabbed the old chair that sat next to the concierge's doorway. He swung at the nearest boy and knocked him flat. Nikki swung her purse and hit another of them before the boy with the blue eyes caught hold of her. One of them kicked David's legs out from under him and he went down, stunned.

Lights started to go on around them, and someone yelled that he was calling the police. The blue-eyed boy held Nikki and looked down into David's face. He grinned, and plunged the blade into her belly, just above her left hip, and drew it up the front of her body, as if he was zipping

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up a jacket. Her life gushed out and the boy let her drop like a broken doll. He turned and ran down the street. His friends followed, carrying the one David had felled.

David crawled to her side and looked into her eyes.

"Damn it," she said. "So close." She sighed deeply. "*Au revoir, encore,* David."

And for the second time he lost her.

This time David's senses were dulled. The awareness of loss was there, but held down, like a big cat in a small cage. Nikki's last words haunted him. "Goodbye, again, David." *Again*? Had she known somehow? Was this more than his dream alone? Was it hers, too? And maybe the blue-eyed boy's? Who *was* the blue-eyed boy? Where did he come from and what did he want? Was he some kind of demon, or an archetypal apparition? What insane karmic wheel were they nailed to? Could any of them get off? David had no way to know, and it gnawed at him.

It seemed to him that he hardly breathed at all in the hours after her second death. He anticipated the inspector's visit with a mixture of fear and anxious desire. Would it happen again?

When the inspector finally arrived, David felt an excitement that threatened to make him scream. He looked quickly through the photos and found the blue-eyed boy.

The inspector asked him if he had ever seen the blue-eyed boy before the attack.

David stared at the picture. Of *course* he had seen him before. But how could he explain it to this man? It had never made sense to David; he'd just learned to live with it. Everything habituates. Even now, this conversation . . . If only he could predict! Everything existed behind a thin veil of anticipation. "I don't think I've ever met him before," David said, without looking up.

"You are sure?" the inspector said.

"Oh, yes."

The inspector pulled another photograph from a manila envelope and handed it to David. This one showed a young boy lying on a stainless-steel table. "And this one?"

David recognized the boy he had hit with the chair. "What happened to him?"

"Cerebral hemorrhage from a blow to the temple. Do you recognize him?"

David nodded. "That's one of them."

The inspector gathered up his photos and stood. "Do not worry. We will catch them."

Soon after the inspector left, David walked down the winding stairs.

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He left the courtyard, avoiding the place where Nikki's blood still stained the stones. He walked the streets slowly, aware of the soft warmth of the Paris night.

It was late when he turned onto the Boulevard des Invalides and headed for the Métro St. François Xavier.

The platform was empty. As he waited for the train his feelings flip-flopped from elation to terror. What if they'd had their chance and blown it? What if she wasn't on the train? No! She'd be there. She had to be!

Or, if she was, what if he didn't get on the train? He knew where she lived. He could wait until tomorrow and go to the apartment and meet her there. Wouldn't that break the cycle? Would it? All he knew with certainty was that things *could* be changed.

The train pulled in and he looked into the passing cars. There she was. Let it leave, he told himself. You can break the cycle. You can find her tomorrow. Then Nikki turned and looked out the window at him. She seemed different. Older, perhaps. More self-assured.

He felt a chill pass through him. Where has she been? What has she seen?

She smiled at him.

She knows, he thought. She knows the risk.

He stood there, awed by her strength. Could he match it? He hesitated. Could they do it again? Even if it ended in death? Something in her look told him they could.

David stepped onto the Métro. ●

LASER LOVE

Touch is no longer required.
My lasers touch your body,
trace maps
of your mouth breasts genitalia
your whole body
configured
the shadows calculated
for each part
for each movement
for each time of day or night.
Your variables overwhelming my capabilities as
The speed of your light comes
and pleasure is calculated.

—Roger Dutcher

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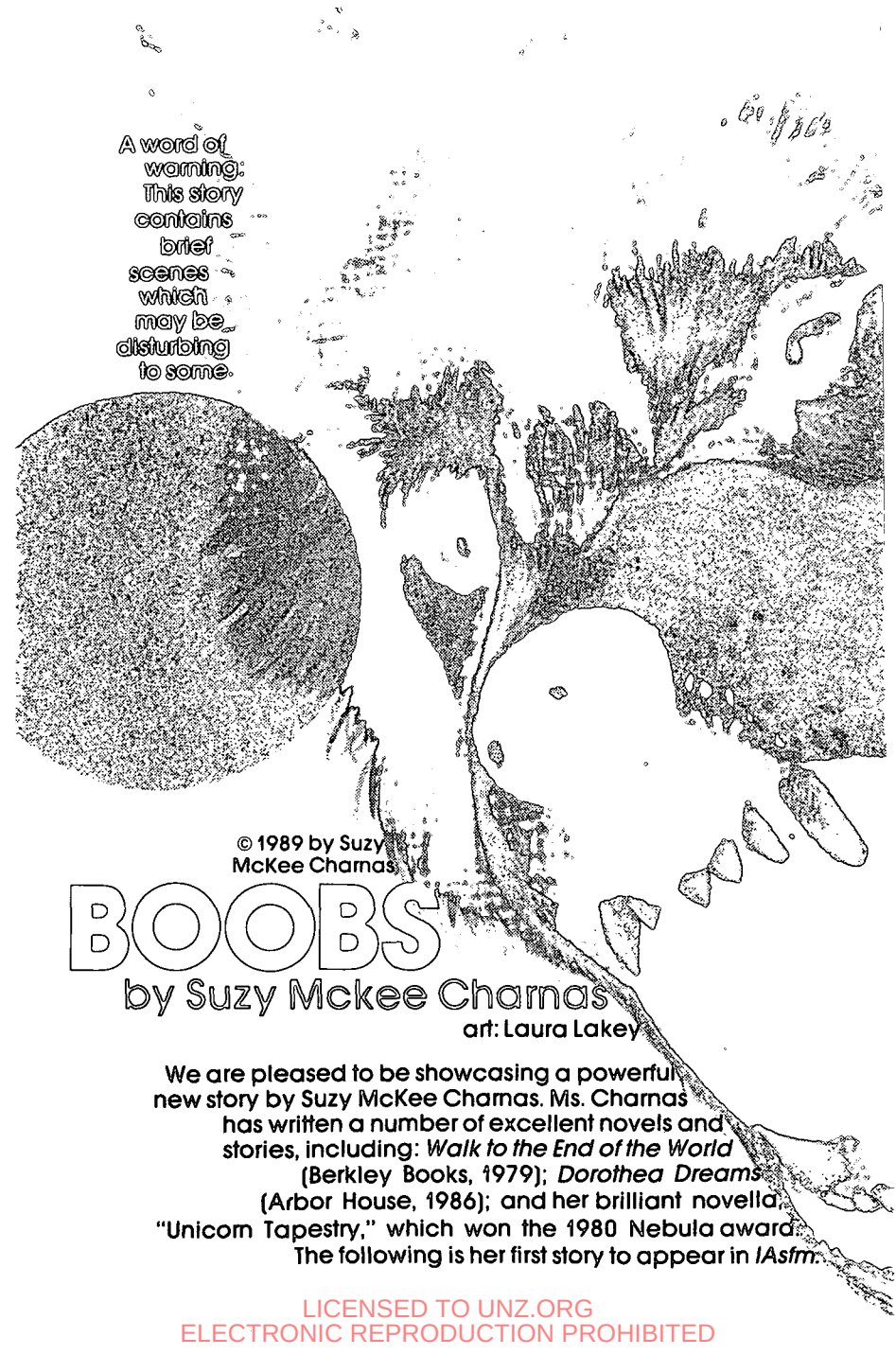

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BOOBS

by Suzy Mckee Charnas

art: Laura Lakey

We are pleased to be showcasing a powerful new story by Suzy McKee Charnas. Ms. Charnas has written a number of excellent novels and stories, including: *Walk to the End of the World* (Berkley Books, 1979); *Dorothea Dreams* (Arbor House, 1986); and her brilliant novella, "Unicorn Tapestry," which won the 1980 Nebula award. The following is her first story to appear in *IAsfm*.

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The thing is, it's like your brain wants to go on thinking about the miserable history mid-term you have to take tomorrow, but your body takes over. And what a body! You can see in the dark and run like the wind and leap parked cars in a single bound.

Of course you pay for it next morning (but it's worth it). I always wake up stiff and sore, with dirty hands and feet and face, and I have to jump in the shower fast so Hilda won't see me like that.

Not that she would know what it was about, but why take chances? So I pretend it's the other thing that's bothering me. So she goes, "Come on, sweetie, everybody gets cramps, that's no reason to go around moaning and groaning. What are you doing, trying to get out of school just because you've got your period?"

If I didn't like Hilda, which I do even though she is only a stepmother instead of my real mother, I would show her something that would keep me out of school forever, and it's not fake, either.

But there are plenty of people I'd rather show that to.

I already showed that dork Billy Linden.

"Hey, Boobs!" he goes, in the hall right outside Homeroom. A lot of kids laughed, naturally, though Rita Frye called him an asshole.

Billy is the one that started it, sort of, because he always started everything, him with his big mouth. At the beginning of term, he came barreling down on me hollering, "Hey, look at Bornstein, something musta happened to her over the summer! What happened, Bornstein? Hey, everybody, look at Boobs Bornstein!"

He made a grab at my chest, and I socked him in the shoulder, and he punched me in the face, which made me dizzy and shocked and made me cry, too, in front of everybody.

I mean, I always used to wrestle and fight with the boys, being that I was strong for a girl. All of a sudden it was different. He hit me hard, to really hurt, and the shock sort of got me in the pit of my stomach and made me feel nauseous, too, as well as mad and embarrassed to death.

I had to go home with a bloody nose and lie with my head back and ice wrapped in a towel on my face and dripping down into my hair.

Hilda sat on the couch next to me and patted me. She goes, "I'm sorry about this, honey, but really, you have to learn it sometime. You're all growing up and the boys are getting stronger than you'll ever be. If you fight with boys, you're bound to get hurt. You have to find other ways to handle them."

To make things worse, the next morning I started to bleed down there, which Hilda had explained carefully to me a couple of times, so at least I knew what was going on. Hilda really tried extra hard without being icky about it, but I hated when she talked about how it was all part of

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these exciting changes in my body that are so important and how terrific it is to "become a young woman."

Sure. The whole thing was so messy and disgusting, worse than she had said, worse than I could imagine, with these black clots of gunk coming out in a smear of pink blood—I thought I would throw up. That's just the lining of your uterus, Hilda said. Big deal. It was still gross.

And plus, the *smell.*

Hilda tried to make me feel better, she really did. She said we should "mark the occasion" like primitive people do, so it's something special, not just a nasty thing that just sort of falls on you.

So we decided to put poor old Pinkie away, my stuffed dog that I've slept with since I was three. Pinkie is bald and sort of hard and lumpy, since he got put in the washing machine by mistake, and you would never know he was all soft plush when he was new, or even that he was pink.

Last time my friend Gerry-Anne came over, before the summer, she saw Pinky laying on my pillow and though she didn't say anything, I could tell she was thinking that was kind of babyish. So I'd been thinking about not keeping Pinky around anymore.

Hilda and I made him this nice box lined with pretty scraps from her quilting class, and I thanked him out loud for being my friend for so many years, and we put him up in the closet, on the top shelf.

I felt terrible, but if Gerry-Anne decided I was too babyish to be friends with anymore, I could end up with no friends at all. When you have never been popular since the time you were skinny and fast and everybody wanted you on their team, you have that kind of thing on your mind.

Hilda and Dad made me go to school the next morning so nobody would think I was scared of Billy Linden (which I was) or that I would let him keep me away just by being such a dork.

Everybody kept sneaking funny looks at me and whispering, and I was sure it was because I couldn't help walking funny with the pad between my legs and because they could smell what was happening, which as far as I knew hadn't happened to anybody else in Eight A yet. Just like nobody else in the whole grade had anything real in their stupid training bras except me, thanks a lot.

Anyway I stayed away from everybody as much as I could and wouldn't talk to Gerry-Anne, even, because I was scared she would ask me why I walked funny and smelled bad.

Billy Linden avoided me just like everybody else, except one of his stupid buddies purposely bumped into me so I stumbled into Billy on the lunch-line. Billy turns around and he goes, real loud, "Hey, Boobs, when did you start wearing black and blue make-up?"

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I didn't give him the satisfaction of knowing that he had actually broken my nose, which the doctor said. Good thing they don't have to bandage you up for that. Billy would be hollering up a storm about how I had my nose in a sling as well as my boobs.

That night I got up after I was supposed to be asleep and took off my underpants and T-shirt that I sleep in and stood looking at myself in the mirror. I didn't need to turn a light on. The moon was full and it was shining right into my bedroom through the big dormer window.

I crossed my arms and pinched myself hard to sort of punish my body for what it was doing to me.

As if that could make it stop.

No wonder Edie Siler had starved herself to death in the tenth grade! I understood her perfectly. She was trying to keep her body down, keep it normal-looking, thin and strong, like I was too, back when I looked like a person, not a cartoon that somebody would call "Boobs."

And then something warm trickled in a little line down the inside of my leg, and I knew it was blood and I couldn't stand it anymore. I pressed my thighs together and shut my eyes hard, and I did something.

I mean I felt it happening. I felt myself shrink down to a hard core of sort of cold fire inside my bones, and all the flesh part, the muscles and the squishy insides and the skin, went sort of glowing and free-floating, all shining with moonlight, and I felt a sort of shifting and balance-changing going on.

I thought I was fainting on account of my stupid period. So I turned around and threw myself on my bed, only by the time I hit it, I knew something was seriously wrong.

For one thing, my nose and my head were crammed with these crazy, rich sensations that it took me a second to even figure out were smells, they were so much stronger than any smells I'd ever smelled. And they were—I don't know—*interesting* instead of just stinky, even the rotten ones.

I opened my mouth to get the smells a little better, and heard myself panting in a funny way as if I'd been running, which I hadn't, and then there was this long part of my face sticking out and something moving there—my tongue.

I was licking my chops.

Well, there was this moment of complete and utter panic. I tore around the room whining and panting and hearing my toenails clicking on the floorboards, and then I huddled down and crouched in the corner because I was scared Dad and Hilda would hear me and come to find out what was making all this racket.

Because I could hear them. I could hear their bed creak when one of them turned over, and Dad's breath whistling a little in an almost snore,

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and I could smell them too, each one with a perfectly clear bunch of smells, kind of like those desserts of mixed ice cream they call a medley.

My body was twitching and jumping with fear and energy, and my room — it's a converted attic-space, wide but with a ceiling that's low in places—my room felt like a jail. And plus, I was terrified of catching a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I had a pretty good idea of what I would see, and I didn't want to see it.

Besides, I had to pee, and I couldn't face trying to deal with the toilet in the state I was in.

So I eased the bedroom door open with my shoulder and nearly fell down the stairs trying to work them with four legs and thinking about it, instead of letting my body just do it. I put my hands on the front door to open it, but my hands weren't hands, they were paws with long knobby toes covered with fur, and the toes had thick black claws sticking out of the ends of them.

The pit of my stomach sort of exploded with horror, and I yelled. It came out this wavery "wooo" noise that echoed eerily in my skullbones. Upstairs, Hilda goes, "Jack, what was that?" I bolted for the basement as I heard Dad hit the floor of their bedroom.

The basement door slips its latch all the time, so I just shoved it open and down I went, doing better on the stairs this time because I was too scared to think. I spent the rest of the night down there, moaning to myself (which meant whining through my nose, really) and trotting around rubbing against the walls trying to rub off this crazy shape I had, or just moving around because I couldn't sit still. The place was thick with stinks and these slow-swirling currents of hot and cold air. I couldn't handle all the input.

As for having to pee, in the end I managed to sort of hike my butt up over the edge of the slop-sink by Dad's workbench and let go in there. The only problem was that I couldn't turn the taps on to rinse out the smell because of my paws.

Then about three A.M. I woke up from a doze curled up in a bare place on the floor where the spiders weren't so likely to walk, and I couldn't see a thing or smell anything either, so I knew I was okay again even before I checked and found fingers on my hands again instead of claws.

I zipped upstairs and stood under the shower so long that Hilda yelled at me for using up the hot water when she had a load of wash to do that morning. I was only trying to steam some of the stiffness out of my muscles, but I couldn't tell her that.

It was real weird to just dress and go to school after a night like that. One good thing, I had stopped bleeding after only one day, which Hilda said wasn't so strange for the first time. So it had to be the huge greenish bruise on my face from Billy's punch that everybody was staring at.

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That and the usual thing, of course. Well, why not? *They* didn't know I'd spent the night as a wolf.

So Fat Joey grabbed my book bag in the hallway outside science class and tossed it to some kid from Eight B. I had to run after them to get it back, which of course was set up so the boys could cheer the jouncing of my boobs under my shirt.

I was so mad I almost caught Fat Joey, except I was afraid if I grabbed him, maybe he would sock me like Billy had.

Dad had told me, Don't let it get you, kid, all boys are jerks at that age.

Hilda had been saying all summer, Look, it doesn't do any good to walk around all hunched up with your arms crossed, you should just throw your shoulders back and walk like a proud person who's pleased that she's growing up. You're just a little early, that's all, and I bet the other girls are secretly envious of you, with their cute little training bras, for Chrissake, as if there was something that needed to be *trained.*

It's okay for her, she's not in school, she doesn't remember what it's like.

So I quit running and walked after Joey until the bell rang, and then I got my book bag back from the bushes outside where he threw it. I was crying a little, and I ducked into the girls' room.

Stacey Buhl was in there doing her lipstick like usual and wouldn't talk to me like usual, but Rita came bustling in and said somebody should off that dumb dork Joey, except of course it was really Billy that put him up to it. Like usual.

Rita is okay except she's an outsider herself, being that her kid brother has AIDS, and lots of kids' parents don't think she should even be in the school. So I don't hang around with her a lot. I've got enough trouble, and anyway I was late for Math.

I had to talk to somebody, though. After school I told Gerry-Anne, who's been my best friend on and off since fourth grade. She was off at the moment, but I found her in the library and I told her I'd had a weird dream about being a wolf. She wants to be a psychiatrist like her mother, so of course she listened.

She told me I was nuts. That was a big help.

That night I made sure the back door wasn't exactly closed, and then I got in bed with no clothes on—imagine turning into a wolf in your underpants and T-shirt—and just shivered, waiting for something to happen.

The moon came up and shone in my window, and I changed again, just like before, which is not one bit like how it is in the movies—all struggling and screaming and bones snapping out with horrible cracking and tearing noises, just the way I guess you would imagine it to be, if you knew

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it had to be done by building special machines to do that for the camera and make it look real: if you were a special effects man, instead of a werewolf.

For me, it didn't have to look real, it was real. It was this melting and drifting thing, which I got sort of excited by it this time. I mean it felt—interesting. Like something I was doing, instead of just another dumb body-mess happening to me because some brainless hormones said so.

I must have made a noise. Hilda came upstairs to the door of my bedroom, but luckily she didn't come in. She's tall, and my ceiling is low for her, so she often talks to me from the landing.

Anyway I'd heard her coming, so I was in my bed with my whole head shoved under my pillow, praying frantically that nothing showed.

I could smell her, it was the wildest thing—her own smell, sort of sweaty but sweet, and then on top of it her perfume, like an ice-pick stuck in my nose. I didn't actually hear a word she said, I was too scared, and also I had this ripply shaking feeling inside me, a high that was only partly terror.

See, I realized all of a sudden, with this big blossom of surprise, that I didn't have to be scared of Hilda, or anybody. I was strong, my wolf-body was strong, and anyhow one clear look at me and she would drop dead.

What a relief, though, when she went away. I was dying to get out from under the weight of the covers, and besides I had to sneeze. Also I recognized that part of the energy roaring around inside me was hunger.

They went to bed—I heard their voices even in their bedroom, though not exactly what they said, which was fine. The words weren't important anymore, I could tell more from the tone of what they were saying.

Like I knew they were going to do it, and I was right. I could hear them messing around right through the walls, which was also something new, and I have never been so embarrassed in my life. I couldn't even put my hands over my ears, because my hands were paws.

So while I was waiting for them to go to sleep, I looked myself over in the big mirror on my closet door.

There was this big wolf head with a long slim muzzle and a thick ruff around my neck. The ruff stood up as I growled and backed up a little.

Which was silly of course, there was no wolf in the bedroom but me. But I was all strung out, I guess, and one wolf, me in my wolf body, was as much as I could handle the idea of, let alone two wolves, me and my reflection.

After that first shock, it was great. I kept turning one way and another for different views.

I was thin, with these long, slender legs but strong, you could see the

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muscles, and feet a little bigger than I would have picked. But I'll take four big feet over two big boobs any day.

My face was terrific, with jaggedy white ripsaw teeth and eyes that were small and clear and gleaming in the moonlight. The tail was a little bizarre, but I got used to it, and actually it had a nice plumy shape. My shoulders were big and covered with long, glossy-looking fur, and I had this neat coloring, dark on the back and a sort of melting silver on my front and underparts.

The thing was, though, my tongue, hanging out. I had a lot of trouble with that, it looked gross and silly at the same time. I mean, that was *my tongue*, about a foot long and neatly draped over the points of my bottom canines. That was when I realized that I didn't have a whole lot of expressions to use, not with that face, which was more like a mask.

But it was alive, it was my face, those were my own long black lips that my tongue licked.

No doubt about it, this was *me*. I was a werewolf, like in the movies they showed over Halloween weekend. But it wasn't anything like your ugly movie werewolf that's just some guy loaded up with pounds and pounds of make-up. I was *gorgeous*.

I didn't want to just hang around admiring myself in the mirror, though. I couldn't stand being cooped up in that stuffy, smell-crowded room.

When everything settled down and I could hear Dad and Hilda breathing the way they do when they're sleeping, I snuck out.

The dark wasn't very dark to me, and the cold felt sharp like vinegar, but not in a hurting way. Everyplace I went, there were these currents like waves in the air, and I could draw them in through my long wolf nose and roll the smell of them over the back of my tongue. It was like a whole different world, with bright sounds everywhere and rich, strong smells.

And I could run.

I started running because a car came by while I was sniffing at the garbage bags on the curb, and I was really scared of being seen in the headlights. So I took off down the dirt alley between our house and the Morrisons' next door, and holy cow, I could tear along with hardly a sound, I could jump their picket fence without even thinking about it. My back legs were like steel springs and I came down solid and square on four legs with almost no shock at all, let alone worrying about losing my balance or twisting an ankle.

Man, I could run through that chilly air all thick and moisty with smells, I could almost fly. It was like last year, when I didn't have boobs bouncing and yanking in front even when I'm only walking fast.

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Just two rows of neat little bumps down the curve of my belly. I sat down and looked.

I tore open garbage bags to find out about the smells in them, but I didn't eat anything from them. I wasn't about to chow down on other people's stale hotdog-ends and pizza crusts and fat and bones scraped off their plates and all mixed in with mashed potatoes and stuff.

When I found places where dogs had stopped and made their mark, I squatted down and pissed there too, right on top, I just wiped them *out*.

I bounded across that enormous lawn around the Wanscombe place, where nobody but the Oriental gardener ever sets foot, and walked up the back and over the top of their BMW, leaving big fat pawprints all over it. Nobody saw me, nobody heard me, I was a shadow.

Well, except for the dogs, of course.

There was a lot of barking when I went by, real hysterics, which at first I was really scared about. But then I popped out of an alley up on Ridge Road, where the big houses are, right in front of about six dogs that run together. Their owners let them out all night and don't care if they get hit by a car.

They'd been trotting along with the wind behind them, checking out all the garbage bags set out for pickup the next morning. When they saw me, one of them let out a yelp of surprise, and they all skidded to a stop.

Six of them. I was scared. I growled.

The dogs turned fast, banging into each other in their hurry, and trotted away.

I don't know what they would have done if they met a real wolf, but I was something special, I guess.

I followed them.

They scattered and ran.

Well, I ran too, and this was a different kind of running. I mean, I stretched, and I raced, and there was this joy. I chased one of them.

Zig, zag, this little terrier-kind of dog tried to cut left and dive under the gate of somebody's front walk, all without a sound—he was running too hard to yell, and I was happy running quiet.

Just before he could ooze under the gate, I caught up with him and without thinking I grabbed the back of his neck and pulled him off his feet and gave him a shake as hard as I could, from side to side.

I felt his neck crack, the sound vibrated through all the bones of my face.

I picked him up in my mouth, and it was like he hardly weighed a thing. I trotted away holding him up off the ground, and under a bush in Baker's Park I held him down with my paws and I bit into his belly, that was still warm and quivering.

Like I said, I was hungry.

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The blood gave me this rush like you wouldn't believe. I stood there a minute looking around and licking my lips, just sort of panting and tasting the taste because I was stunned by it, it was like eating honey or the best chocolate malted you ever had.

So I put my head down and chomped that little dog, like shoving your face into a pizza and inhaling it. God, I was *starved,* so I didn't mind that the meat was tough and rank-tasting after that first wonderful bite. I even licked blood off the ground after, never mind the grit mixed in.

I ate two more dogs that night, one that was tied up on a clothesline in a cruddy yard full of rusted-out car parts down on the South side, and one fat old yellow dog out snuffling around on his own and way too slow. He tasted pretty bad, and by then I was feeling full, so I left a lot.

I strolled around the park, shoving the swings with my big black wolf nose, and I found the bench where Mr. Granby sits and feeds the pigeons every day, never mind that nobody else wants the dirty birds around crapping on their cars. I took a dump there, right where he sits.

Then I gave the setting moon a goodnight, which came out quavery and wild, "Loo-loo-loo!" And I loped toward home, springing off the thick pads of my paws and letting my tongue loll out and feeling generally super.

I slipped inside and trotted upstairs, and in my room I stopped to look at myself in the mirror.

As gorgeous as before, and only a few dabs of blood on me, which I took time to lick off. I did get a little worried—I mean, suppose that was it, suppose having killed and eaten what I'd killed in my wolf shape, I was stuck in this shape forever? Like, if you wander into a fairy castle and eat or drink anything, that's it, you can't ever leave. Suppose when the morning came I didn't change back?

Well, there wasn't much I could do about that one way or the other, and to tell the truth, I felt like I wouldn't mind; it had been worth it.

When I was nice and clean, including licking off my own bottom which seemed like a perfectly normal and nice thing to do at the time, I jumped up on the bed, curled up, and corked right off. When I woke up with the sun in my eyes, there I was, my own self again.

It was very strange, grabbing breakfast and wearing my old sweatshirt that wallowed all over me so I didn't stick out so much, while Hilda yawned and shuffled around in her robe and slippers and acted like her and Dad hadn't been doing it last night, which I knew different.

And plus, it was perfectly clear that she didn't have a clue about what *I* had been doing, which gave me a strange feeling.

One of the things about growing up which they're careful not to tell you is, you start having more things you don't talk to your parents about. And I had a doozie.

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Hilda goes, "What's the matter, are you off Sugar Pops now? Honestly, Kelsey, I can't keep up with you! And why can't you wear something nicer than that old shirt to school? Oh, I get it: disguise, right?"

She sighed and looked at me kind of sad but smiling, her hands on her hips. "Kelsey, Kelsey," she goes, "if only I'd had half of what you've got when *I* was a girl—I was flat as an ironing board, and it made me so miserable, I can't tell you."

She's still real thin and neat-looking, so what does she know about it? But she meant well, and anyhow I was feeling so good I didn't argue.

I didn't change my shirt, though.

That night I didn't turn into a wolf. I laid there waiting, but though the moon came up, nothing happened no matter how hard I tried, and after a while I went and looked out the window and realized that the moon wasn't really full anymore, it was getting smaller.

I wasn't so much relieved as sorry. I bought a calendar at the school book sale two weeks later, and I checked the full moon nights coming up and waited anxiously to see what would happen.

Meantime, things rolled along as usual. I got a rash of zits on my chin. I would look in the mirror and think about my wolf-face, that had beautiful sleek fur instead of zits.

Zits and all I went to Angela Durkin's party, and next day Billy Linden told everybody that I went in one of the bedrooms at Angela's and made out with him, which I did not. But since no grown-ups were home and Fat Joey brought grass to the party, most of the kids were stoned and didn't know who did what or where anyhow.

As a matter of fact, Billy once actually did get a girl in Seven B high one time out in his parents' garage, and him and two of his friends did it to her while she was zonked out of her mind, or anyway they said they did, and she was too embarrassed to say anything one way or the other, and a little while later she changed schools.

How I know about it is the same way everybody else does, which is because Billy was the biggest boaster in the whole school, and you could never tell if he was lying or not.

So I guess it wasn't so surprising that some people believed what Billy said about me. Gerry-Anne quit talking to me after that. Meantime Hilda got pregnant.

This turned into a huge discussion about how Hilda had been worried about her biological clock so she and Dad had decided to have a kid, and I shouldn't mind, it would be fun for me and good preparation for being a mother myself later on, when I found some nice guy and got married.

Sure. Great preparation. Like Mary O'Hare in my class, who gets to change her youngest baby sister's diapers all the time, yick. She jokes

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about it, but you can tell she really hates it. Now it looked like it was my turn coming up, as usual.

The only thing that made life bearable was my secret.

"You're laid back today," Devon Brown said to me in the lunchroom one day after Billy had been specially obnoxious, trying to flick rolled up pieces of bread from his table so they would land on my chest. Devon was sitting with me because he was bad at French, my only good subject, and I was helping him out with some verbs. I guess he wanted to know why I wasn't upset because of Billy picking on me. He goes, "How come?"

"That's a secret," I said, thinking about what Devon would say if he knew a werewolf was helping him with his French: *loup. Manger.*

He goes, "What secret?" Devon has freckles and is actually kind of cute-looking.

"A secret," I go, "so I can't tell you, dummy."

He looks real superior and he goes, "Well, it can't be much of a secret, because girls can't keep secrets, everybody knows that."

Sure, like that kid Sara in Eight B who it turned out her own father had been molesting her for years, but she never told anybody until some psychologist caught on from some tests we all had to take in seventh grade. Up till then, Sara kept her secret fine.

And I kept mine, marking off the days on the calendar. The only part I didn't look forward to was having a period again, which last time came right before the change.

When the time came, I got crampy and more zits popped out on my face, but I didn't have a period.

I changed, though.

The next morning they were talking in school about a couple of prize miniature Schnauzers at the Wanscombes that had been hauled out of their yard by somebody and killed, and almost nothing left of them.

Well, my stomach turned a little when I heard some kids describing what Mr. Wanscombe had found over in Baker's Park, "the remains," as people said. I felt a little guilty, too, because Mrs. Wanscombe had really loved those little dogs, which somehow I didn't think about at all when I was a wolf the night before, trotting around hungry in the moonlight.

I knew those Schnauzers personally, so I was sorry, even if they were irritating little mutts that made a lot of noise.

But heck, the Wanscombes shouldn't have left them out all night in the cold. Anyhow, they were rich, they could buy new ones if they wanted.

Still and all, though. I mean, dogs are just dumb animals. If they're mean, it's because they're wired that way or somebody made them mean, they can't help it. They can't just decide to be nice, like a person can. And plus, they don't taste so great, I think because they put so much

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junk in commercial dog-foods—anti-worm medicine and ashes and ground up fish, stuff like that. Ick.

In fact after the second schnauzer I had felt sort of sick and I didn't sleep real well that night. So I was not in a great mood to start with; and that was the day that my new brassiere disappeared while I was in gym. Later on I got passed a note telling me where to find it: stapled to the bulletin board outside the Principal's office, where everybody could see that I was trying a bra with an underwire.

Naturally, it had to be Stacey Buhl that grabbed my bra while I was changing for gym and my back was turned, since she was now hanging out with Billy and his friends.

Billy went around all day making bets at the top of his lungs on how soon I would be wearing a D-cup.

Stacey didn't matter, she was just a jerk. Billy mattered. He had wrecked me in that school forever, with his nasty mind and his big, fat mouth. I was past crying or fighting and getting punched out. I was boiling, I had had enough crap from him, and I had an idea.

I followed Billy home and waited on his porch until his mom came home and she made him come down and talk to me. He stood in the doorway and talked through the screen door, eating a banana and lounging around like he didn't have a care in the world.

So he goes, "Whatcha want, Boobs?"

I stammered a lot, being I was so nervous about telling such big lies, but that probably made me sound more believable.

I told him that I would make a deal with him: I would meet him that night in Baker's Park, late, and take off my shirt and bra and let him do whatever he wanted with my boobs if that would satisfy his curiosity and he would find somebody else to pick on and leave me alone.

"What?" he said, staring at my chest with his mouth open. His voice squeaked and he was practically drooling on the floor. He couldn't believe his good luck.

I said the same thing over again.

He almost came out onto the porch to try it right then and there. "Well, shit," he goes, lowering his voice a lot, "why didn't you say something before? You really mean it?"

I go, "Sure," though I couldn't look at him.

After a minute he goes, "Okay, it's a deal. Listen, Kelsey, if you like it, can we, uh, do it again, you know?"

I go, "Sure. But Billy, one thing: this is a secret, between just you and me. If you tell anybody, if there's one other person hanging around out there tonight—"

"Oh no," he goes, real fast, "I won't say a thing to anybody, honest. Not a word, I promise!"

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Not until afterward, of course, was what he meant, which if there was one thing Billy Linden couldn't do, it was to keep quiet if he knew something bad about another person.

"You're gonna like it, I know you are," he goes, speaking strictly for himself as usual. "Jeez. I can't believe this!"

But he did, the dork.

I couldn't eat much for dinner that night, I was too excited, and I went upstairs early to do homework, I told Dad and Hilda.

Then I waited for the moon, and when it came, I changed.

Billy was in the park. I caught a whiff of him, very sweaty and excited, but I stayed cool. I snuck around for a while, as quiet as I could—which was real quiet—making sure none of his stupid friends were lurking around. I mean, I wouldn't have trusted just his promise for a million dollars.

I passed up half a hamburger lying in the gutter where somebody had parked for lunch next to Baker's Park. My mouth watered, but I didn't want to spoil my appetite. I was hungry and happy, sort of singing inside my own head, "Shoo, fly, pie, and an apple-pan-dowdie . . ."

Without any sound, of course.

Billy had been sitting on a bench, his hands in his pockets, twisting around to look this way and that way, watching for me—for my human self—to come join him. He had a jacket on, being it was very chilly out.

Which he didn't stop to think that maybe a sane person wouldn't be crazy enough to sit out there and take off her top leaving her naked skin bare to the breeze. But that was Billy all right, totally fixed on his own greedy self and without a single thought for somebody else. I bet all he could think about was what a great scam this was, to feel up old Boobs in the park and then crow about it all over school.

Now he was walking around the park, kicking at the sprinkler-heads and glancing up every once in a while, frowning and looking sulky.

I could see he was starting to think that I might stand him up. Maybe he even suspected that old Boobs was lurking around watching him and laughing to herself because he had fallen for a trick. Maybe old Boobs had even brought some kids from school with her to see what a jerk he was.

Actually that would have been pretty good, except Billy probably would have broken my nose for me again, or worse, if I'd tried it.

"Kelsey?" he goes, sounding mad.

I didn't want him stomping off home in a huff. I moved up closer, and I let the bushes swish a little around my shoulders.

He goes, "Hey, Kelse, it's late, where've you been?"

I listened to the words, but mostly I listened to the little thread of

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worry flickering in his voice, low and high, high and low, as he tried to figure out what was going on.

I let out the whisper of a growl.

He stood real still, staring at the bushes, and he goes, "That you, Kelse? Answer me."

I was wild inside. I couldn't wait another second. I tore through the bushes and leaped for him, flying.

He stumbled backward with a squawk—"What!"—jerking his hands up in front of his face, and he was just sucking in a big breath to yell with when I hit him like a demo-derby truck.

I jammed my nose past his feeble claws and chomped down hard on his face.

No sound came out of him except this wet, thick gurgle, which I could more taste than hear because the sound came right into my mouth with the gush of his blood and the hot mess of meat and skin that I tore away and swallowed.

He thrashed around, hitting at me, but I hardly felt anything through my fur. I mean, he wasn't so big and strong laying there on the ground with me straddling him all lean and wiry with wolf-muscle. And plus, he was in shock. I got a strong whiff from below as he let go of everything right into his pants.

Dogs were barking, but so many people around Baker's Park have dogs to keep out burglars, and the dogs make such a racket all the time, that nobody pays any attention. I wasn't worried. Anyway, I was too busy to care.

I nosed in under what was left of Billy's jaw and I bit his throat out.

Now let him go around telling lies about people.

His clothes were a lot of trouble and I really missed having hands. I managed to drag his shirt out of his belt with my teeth, though, and it was easy to tear his belly open. Pretty messy, but once I got in there, it was better than Thanksgiving dinner. Who would think that somebody as horrible as Billy Linden could taste so *good*?

He was barely moving by then, and I quit thinking about him as Billy Linden anymore. I quit thinking at all, I just pushed my head in and pulled out delicious steaming chunks and ate until I was picking at tidbits, and everything was getting cold.

On the way home I saw a police car cruising the neighborhood the way they do sometimes. I hid in the shadows and of course they never saw me.

There was a lot of washing up to do in the morning, and when Hilda saw my sheets she shook her head and she goes, "You should be more careful about keeping track of your period so as not to get caught by surprise."

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Everybody in school knew something had happened to Billy Linden, but it wasn't until the day after that that they got the word. Kids stood around in little huddles trading rumors about how some wild animal had chewed Billy up. I would walk up and listen in and add a really gross remark or two, like part of the game of thrilling each other green and nauseous with made-up details to see who would upchuck first.

Not me, that's for sure. I mean, when somebody went on about how Billy's whole head was gnawed down to the skull and they didn't even know who he was except from the bus pass in his wallet, I got a little urpy. It's amazing the things people will dream up. But when I thought about what I had actually done to Billy, I had to smile.

It felt totally wonderful to walk through the halls without having anybody yelling, "Hey, Boobs!"

Even my social life is looking up. Gerry-Anne is not only talking to me again, she invited me out on a double-date with her. Some guy she met at a party asked her to go to the movies with him next weekend, and he has a friend. They're both from Fawcett Junior High across town, which will be a change. I was nervous when she asked me, but finally I said yes. My first real date!

I am still pretty nervous, to tell the truth. I have to keep promising myself that I will not worry about my chest, I will not be self-conscious, even if the guy stares.

Actually things at school are not completely hunky-dory. Hilda says "That's Life" when I complain about things, and I am beginning to believe her. Fat Joey somehow got to be my lab-partner in Science, and if he doesn't quit trying to grab a feel whenever we have to stand close together to do an experiment, he is going to be sorry.

He doesn't know it, but he's got until the next full moon. ●

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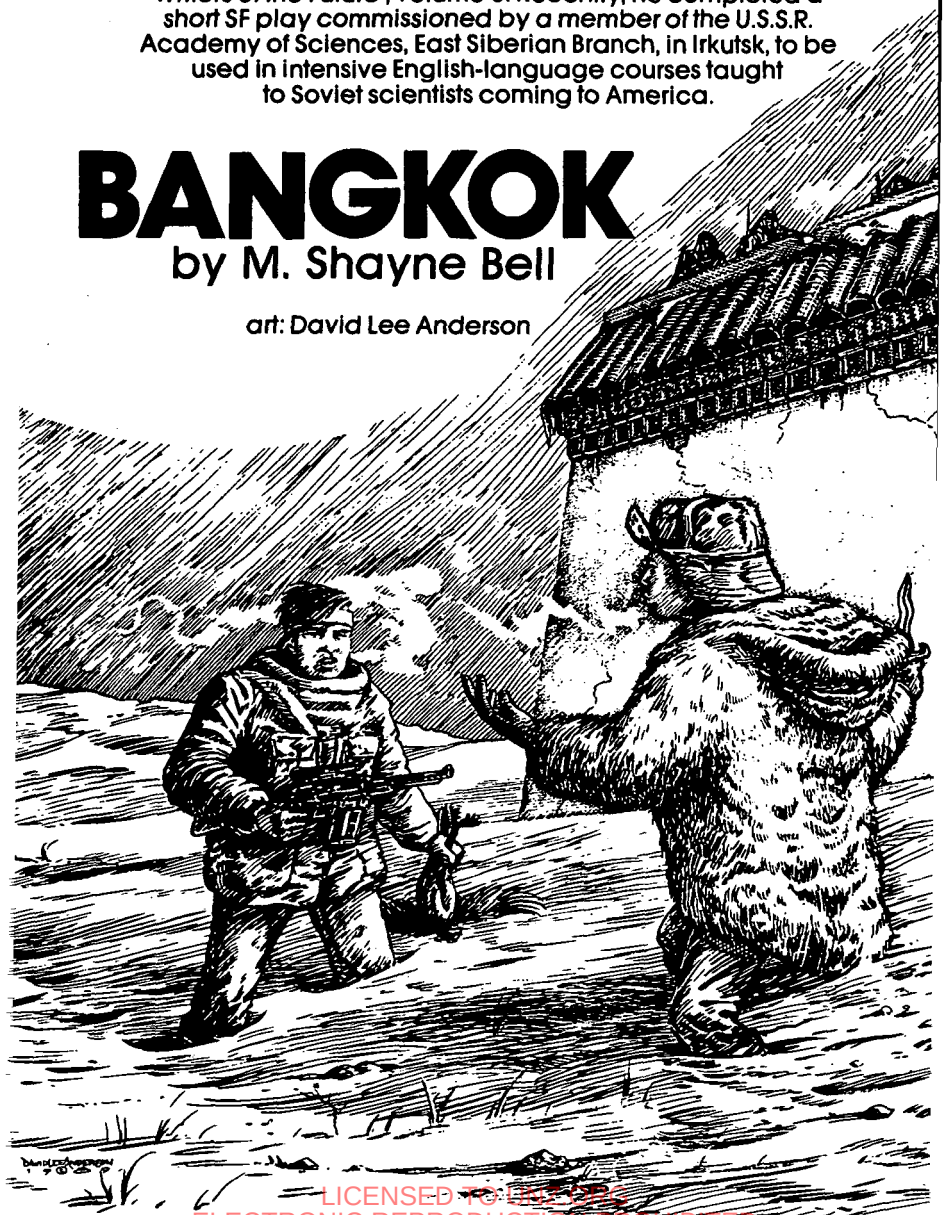
BANGKOK

by M. Shayne Bell

art: David Lee Anderson



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I woke and did not open my eyes. I kept my breathing steady. I had heard two Chin whispering unintelligible words near my feet. The three women keeping watch did nothing. Were their backs all turned away? I shouted, threw off the furs, grabbed my gun, and crouched down, barefoot on the rampart in the falling snow.

Chin soldiers. Two of them, and on the walls of Bangkok. Sirikit, Nuam, and Amphan stumbled up behind me. "Narai!" Amphan shouted.

The Chin laughed and drew their swords and swung them above their heads. I shot the Chin again and again—

But hit only the stone battlement, spattering red sparks on the snow. The light from the gun crackled in the cold air.

Sirikit knocked the gun from my hands. "Ghosts again, Narai?" she asked.

The women could not hold me back from kicking through the snow where the Chin had stood. There were no Chin.

Nuam threw me my coat. I pulled it on. Sirikit brushed the snow from my gun and handed it to me, butt forward. I strapped it against my right leg. "I won't let you sleep with the gun anymore," she said. "What if you shot one of us coming up with wood?"

I sat down to rub my feet dry and pull on my boots. The women, dressed like men, huddled back down around the fire. The fire kept only our pot of oil hot. But I did not allow my body to feel the cold, and I did not listen to the women. "I will go to the Wat and get you bread," I said. The women looked at me. I hurried down the stairs and did not look back. I did not want the women to ask me why I thought the monks would have bread to give us today.

I had seen Chin on the wall, Chin who were not there, and it was not the first time. I did not want to lose my mind.

The monks had no bread, and they had no time for me. They were preparing for Chettha Dhanarat, the high monk, to go to the Chin to offer them lands the sea had left us. Chettha had dreamed of doing this, "of letting peace go into the warm world that will come in a thousand years."

"Go to the gardens," one monk said. "Chettha is there. You did not get his blessing before you left us. Get it now."

The monks of Chettha's wat had cared for me when I was sent wounded to Bangkok. But after the Chin army surrounded the city, I would not wait to heal or to be blessed. I had dressed and left the wat.

Now I needed Chettha's blessing.

The Chin had shot so many holes in the acrylic roof over the gardens that the roof could not be mended. As I entered, snow was falling on trees and on ground that had never known snow. Dry leaves crackled under my feet. Birds that needed warmth lay dead in branches and on

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the yellow grass. I passed monks in boots and heavy coats collecting the last silk harvest. Far off, I saw the rice paddies brown and dry and wondered what the monks would cook on holy days.

Chettha knelt by the pool across from the reclining Buddha of the gardens. In the Buddha's upturned hand lay a rare bird, dead. Its right wing had been crushed, and it had crept into the hand after the bombing, to die there. Its body was covered with green and blue feathers, and its tail spread into a fan of many colors: gold, red, blue, white, green. There were no more birds like that, unless they had them in Ayutthaya-by-the-Sea.

I knelt a little ways off, to wait for Chettha to notice me. Chettha's head was shaved. He wore only a loose yellow robe but did not shiver. The reflecting pool was freezing. A thin ice had formed around the stone banks and was creeping to the brown lilies in the center.

Chettha said nothing for half an hour. I could not sit in one position that long and moved my legs twice. Finally Chettha looked at me and pointed at the bird in Buddha's hand. "Take that bird to the poor," he said. "It will make a fine meal." He stood to leave.

"I need your blessing," I said.

He stopped and looked down at me.

"I see Chin on the walls. I'm afraid of going insane. The monks told me I might ask for your blessing."

"But I've seen dead Chin, too," he said.

I stared at him. He called what I had seen *dead Chin*—ghosts—not lunacy. He stepped forward and put his hands on the sides of my head. "Keep your mind. And may you always find food to give," he said, and was gone.

I gave the bird to a little boy dressed in rags. "The monks had no bread," I told the women. I did not look at them. I stood on the wall and watched Chettha and three of his monks leave Bangkok. They walked through the north gate, away from the walls, toward the Chin camps. The monks were chanting mantras, holding their palms open in front of them, their yellow robes fluttering in the wind and the snow. I called the women to watch, but they soon sat back down around the fire.

I watched an hour on the walls, looking north into the falling snow, hoping for peace. When the snow thinned, I could see far up the Chao Phyra. After the Chao Phyra froze over, the Chin would walk up it into Bangkok, if Chettha failed, laughing at the oil we'd try to throw on them from the walls. Nothing moved on the white plains. Snow hissed and popped on the oil.

I smelled meat. The women were cooking.

"The boy looks away for food," Nuam said. She handed me a spit with a rabbit breast. The meat was black, cooked through, salty.

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"More," I said, handing back the spit. The women laughed. "We'll cook more if you kill more." I wanted more food. I wanted a rabbit to burrow out from under the drifts so I could kill it with the light and then try to beat the snowy owls and the gyrfalcons to the red spot on the snow. I unstrapped the gun. The metal stuck to my fingers.

Nothing moved in the snow. The women uncoiled the rope. Sirikit tied it around her waist so I could hurry over the battlements and down the wall if I shot something. It would be safer to hunt while Chettha bargained with the Chin. The generals had not let us hunt over the walls. The Chin wore the white furs of bears and wolves. We could jump from the walls and be killed by Chin we had not seen. But now our generals—and our captains and lieutenants—were dead, and I fed the women of my watch. The women could not watch with patience, hungry.

Wind blew snow off the drifts. Above Bangkok, the clouds were breaking. Without clouds, the night would be cold. The rabbits would not burrow out. Birds were circling the river and the plains, watching us, watching for the rabbits we wanted. "Will you cook a bird, Nuam?"

"Bag a ptarmigan, and I will cook it," Amphan said.

Ptarmigan were flying in the willows by the Chao Phyra, fifty feet from the wall. One ptarmigan flew out across the drifts, fast, coming for the city. A gyrfalcon circled down for it. I took the ptarmigan in my sight and shot it. It fell, feathers burned by the light. The gyrfalcon flew up in a flutter of wings and began circling, warily.

I was over the battlements, down the rope, buried to my waist in the snow. The women looked on wide-eyed. Sirikit had her bow. Amphan held the quiver. I pushed forward, gun in hand. The gyrfalcon would die before it could take our ptarmigan. I watched the gyrfalcon circling lower, watching me. Suddenly it let out one cry and flew across the Chao Phyra, past Thon Buri. The ptarmigan in the willows flew across the river. I got to the dead ptarmigan. Nerves made its wings twitch. When I picked it up, the women began shouting. I looked at them. Sirikit had an arrow to her bow and the string pulled back, taut. I heard the crust below the new snow break and saw white coming up out of the willows towards me. I jumped to the side, heard it fall past me, turned to face it.

A Chin. He stood up slowly, smiling. "Give me bird and gun," he said, gesturing with one hand, a kris in the other.

We stood five feet apart in the quiet of the snow. The Chin's breath had frozen his mustache to his thin face. He was no older than me.

Other Chin yelled, suddenly, from behind me, from across the plains half a kilometer from the walls. Black arrows fell into the snow, and I did not turn to look. I shot the kris out of the Chin's hand and ran for the walls. An arrow stuck to my coat by my right shoulder. I was at the

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rope. The women pulled me up and over the battlements. I still had the ptarmigan. I dropped it in the snow on the rampart.

Nuam would not let me turn to the battle. She kept trying to unbutton my coat. "Damn you, Narai, will you bleed to death?"

The arrow had gone into my shoulder. It was black from being hardened in a fire, and stiff in my knotted muscle. I pulled it out with one quick jerk and fell to my back. Nuam sat me up, took off my coat, bandaged my shoulder in white cloth while I worked the flint arrowhead through the hole it had made in my coat.

The Chin were at the walls. Arrows were flying over the walls. Sirikit was shooting her arrows through a crenel in the battlements. "The light, Narai!" she said. Amphan and Nuam dragged the pot of oil to the battlements and dumped oil on two Chin climbing a ladder. The Chin screamed. One fell into the snow. The other clung to the ladder, clawing his face: it was cooked brown, crinkled, his eyes blind. He fell back and the ladder fell on top of him. I started shooting Chin: first the Chin with a second ladder, then the Chin with bows. The Chin below us ran. I let them: six Chin struggling away through the snow. The Chin who had asked for my bird and gun was stumbling north along the banks of the Chao Phyra. I had killed five Chin. Sirikit had killed two with her arrows. The oil had killed two more.

It was over, again.

Sirikit carried wood to the fire. Amphan dragged back the empty pot and lifted it onto the wood. Nuam opened a can of oil and dumped the oil in the pot. I sank down on the rampart and pulled on my coat. The ptarmigan was trampled in the snow. I kicked it out and thought of Chettha. We should not have been attacked while Chettha was negotiating in the Chin camp.

Amphan took the bird, cut off its head, let its blood drain out over the wall. Then she cut open the bird's belly and tore out the entrails. Nuam looked through them for the heart, gizzard, kidneys, and liver; she threw the rest over the wall for the gyrfalcons. The offal landed on a Chin's face. Amphan shoved the meat on four skewers. Nuam salted the meat, and she and Amphan held the skewers over the fire. Sirikit was kicking through the snow for Chin arrows to put in her quiver.

"Our babies will be Chin," Nuam said.

We looked at her. She was turning her skewers quickly.

"The ghosts of the Chin we kill—they will be reborn here."

Sirikit shook down the arrows in her quiver. "If the Chin have ghosts, they'll come back as rats in our sewers."

Amphan had wrapped a scarf around her face. She pulled down the left corner. "I've heard if a man dies outside his own land his ghost

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wanders the cities and hills of the new land, lost," she said, "sometimes not believing he is dead."

Ghosts again.

Sirikit looked at me, hard. "Battle nerves and exhaustion, Narai."

Amphan wrapped the scarf back around her face and said nothing more of ghosts.

A six-year-old girl climbed up the stairs with a handful of arrows she and her group had gathered from the streets. The children had become good at standing quietly after a battle and looking for the tiny holes arrows made in the drifts. Sirikit took the arrows. The girl stared at our meat and did not leave. Nuam swore, tore a ptarmigan's leg from a spit and threw it to the girl. The girl caught it and ran down the stairs, gnawing at the leg. "Cook it!" Nuam yelled.

I wanted the meat. I wanted it now. I would have eaten it raw like the girl if Nuam had let me.

A shadow fell across my face. Sirikit stood looking down at me. "How is your shoulder?"

"Cold," I said.

She walked on, kicking through the snow, looking for arrows.

Nuam handed me the ptarmigan's liver. "It cooks fast," she said. I ate it in one bite. I meant to eat it slowly, but I couldn't.

Taksin Naresuan ran up the stairs, out of breath, red faced. We stared at him and at the bag of food he carried. "All the Chin are back," he said. He knew things like that because he worked with the old men and women. "They will probably attack tonight. We sent the night watch to the east and south walls."

Which meant the day watch would stay up to guard the north and west walls. Amphan looked quickly into the fire. The cold was not easy for her. I did not ask Taksin about Chettha and whether he might stop the attack. Taksin had always laughed at Chettha and his plans.

"The Chin must take Bangkok now, for food and a place to wait out the winter, or die in the cold," Taksin said. He kicked snow away from the wall and sat down next to me. "The Chin advance was stopped at Chulalongkorn City."

I looked at him.

"We had a message from Ayutthaya-by-the-Sea."

Sirikit sat down and took a spit from Amphan to help turn it over the fire. "Then the Vitmin have quit jamming the radio," she said.

"They've started quarreling with the Chin."

"The Chin did not get far," Nuam said. "It's only one hundred kilometers south to Chulalongkorn."

"They could not go far without Bangkok," Taksin said. "They need our wheat. We could attack them from the rear. They were forced to leave

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part of their army here." Taksin seemed pleased with this knowledge, pleased that all the Chin were back around our walls.

"Will help come from Ayutthaya?" Amphan asked.

Taksin shrugged. "It is sixteen hundred kilometers to Ayutthaya-by-the-Sea."

Nuam held out a ptarmigan wing to Taksin.

He stood. "I won't take your food. I came to bring you food," he said. He reached in his bag for a loaf of bread and two carrots. Nuam gave her spits to Amphan and took the bread and carrots. Taksin swung the bag over his shoulder and looked out over the plains. "I can't see their tank," he said. I stood and pointed to a snowdrift. We had lost twenty-six men trying to pull the tank inside the walls and finally wrecked it, stripped it, and left it.

Taksin looked at the stones of the river wall churning the Chao Phyra. Amphan handed me a spit with a ptarmigan wing, the back, the heart. These I ate slowly. Taksin accepted the wing from Nuam's spit after he saw mine. He sat down by me to eat.

I knew what it had cost the Chin to drag their tank to Bangkok to knock down our north river wall. Eight months before, the Chin had sacked Chiang Mai. I had gone with the army to drive the Chin back across the passes. The Chin fled north into the mountains and glaciers of Shan and Yunan. We followed them to the border. Once inside the mountains, I was assigned with forty-seven others to forage for the army. We had nineteen hundred men to feed.

One day, we found the spoor of musk oxen: tracks by a stream, the soft underhair wool lining spring nests in the willows. Up a narrow valley we found a lake half free of ice where the musk oxen watered. The master hunter left me hidden in the willows and junipers that grew only on the south shore. "Kill three old cows," he said. "That is all the meat we can prepare before the army moves on." He and the others went down the valley after rabbits and ptarmigan.

I waited. Under the crusts of snow beneath the willows I found wild crocus and blue spikel shoots pushing up through the dirt. In two weeks the valley would be covered with flowers. In six, the flowers would be gone to seed. It was the way of things in the mountains north of Chiang Mai. I picked up a stone. Frost was flaking the stone apart, yet the stone was heavy and fit well in my hand. One brown streak ran a half inch across the stone's surface as if a child had drawn on it and tossed it aside or as if some species of lichen could find food in only one straight crack of the stone and nowhere else.

I looked up. The musk oxen had come. Two cows and a bull so old his coat had turned brown stood watch while twenty others drank at the lake. They stood five feet tall at the shoulder. Hair on their flanks,

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throats, and under their bellies hung long and black, covering their ears and tails. The pregnant females were shedding the soft wool under their hair. Horns curved around the sides of their heads, and a thick boss of horn grew across their foreheads.

They came up dripping from the lake. I threw my stone. It fell short but startled them. I shook the willows. The bull began to snort and shake his head. The cows herded old females and yearling calves into the center of a circle of lowered heads and horns. The bull backed up and took his place, stoic. Such rings were a good defense against wolves but no defense against men.

I unstrapped my gun and killed three cows. But as I looked at the musk oxen, I saw only their meat. Three musk oxen would feed us well for one meal—but twenty-three could feed us for three days. I could rest in camp. The soldiers were tired of rabbit and ptarmigan and caribou. I shot two more cows. The musk oxen began to run. I kept shooting till the master hunter knocked the gun from my hands. He had come back to watch me. "The army will push on tomorrow," he said. "You will stay behind, in charge of a few others, to prepare this meat and carry it after us."

I looked at the ground. The master hunter shoved my gun in his belt and handed me a knife. "Gut them now," he said. "Butcher them in camp."

Seventeen musk oxen lay smoking on rocks by the lake and in snow up the valley. I walked to the bull musk ox. Its burned hair and flesh stank. Its hair and wool made cutting it open hard. I pulled out the genitals and intestines, cut through the diaphragm, windpipe, and esophagus, pulled out the lungs and heart. The blood kept my hands warm till I stood up and felt the wind. I hurried to cut open another musk ox. It took three hours to gut all seventeen. When I started for camp, only the viscera from the last three steamed.

The master hunter sent four of us back with ropes. A transport could not reach the lake because of the snow. We dragged one young cow to camp. The carcass would dig down in the snow going uphill. We had to kick snow away from the musk ox, drag it three or four feet, kick away more snow. At the tops of hills and drifts the carcass would slide down the slope, pulling us with it. The hair would get caught on willows and in the buckles of our boots. Once in camp, we tied the hind feet together, hoisted up the musk ox with a winch, skinned it, and left it for the others to butcher.

The master hunter sent me back with three different hunters after another musk ox. By evening, I had helped drag four musk oxen to camp. I could only sit in camp then, too tired to help with the butchery, but I wanted to go for another musk ox. "Eat first, at least," the other hunters

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said. "Leave them," some of the soldiers whispered. "He won't make you stay behind, not with Chin in the mountains." But I knew the master hunter would leave me, that the men he left with me would hate me. I finally convinced two soldiers to go up valley, though it would be dark when we got back.

But we did not have to pull another musk ox to camp. The soldiers were slow, and I was first to the lake. When I got there, I saw a Chin. He was standing across the lake, very still. One musk ox was gone—dragged up valley. I could see the bloody track of its carcass in the snow. The Chin drew a knife and raised it so that it glistened in the setting sun while he stared at me. With a sudden yell, he charged around the lake. I turned and ran. "Chin!" I yelled. The soldiers dove for cover behind drifts on either side of the path we had made dragging the musk oxen down valley. The Chin was close behind me. I ran between the soldiers. The soldiers killed the Chin. They took his knife and his coat of wolves' skin, and we ran to camp.

All the men of camp spent the night preparing for attack but me. The master hunter had me card loose wool from the musk ox hides. I was through with the carding and packaging by midnight. "What have you learned?" the master hunter asked.

I looked at the ground. "That three were enough."

The master hunter smiled and sent me to help prepare the camp. In the morning, he was killed. I was shot in the stomach with an arrow and sent down the frozen Ping and the Chao Phyra to Bangkok with the wounded. But because of the musk oxen, I knew what it meant to drag something heavy through snow. I knew what it had meant for the Chin to drag their tank to Bangkok.

Smoke began to billow up from the grounds of Dusit Palace. We sat quietly to honor the dead. "One hundred and four today," Taksin said, "with the heads of Chettha Dhanarat and three of his monks."

I looked hard at Taksin. He looked back as if I should have heard. "The Chin threw the heads against the east gate half an hour ago. Word of it came just before I left with the food." He threw the bones of the ptarmigan wing over the wall and stood up. "It will be cold tonight. The old men say a front passed over us. It may snow tomorrow in Ayutthaya."

"Nahm kaang?" Amphan asked, the sudden cold that flows south off the advancing glaciers of Chin, Monglia, and farther north where the sea itself is ice.

"Can't you feel it?" He left, walking down the rampart to take bread and carrots to another watch.

And Chettha was dead. He had not been gone two hours. There would be no peace. I would have to fight the Chin in the night, and I would have to keep fighting, and fighting.

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Nuam tore the loaf into four pieces, broke the carrots in two, and handed out the food.

"So Chettha failed," Sirikit said.

"He was a fool," Nuam said. "The Chin would never live with us and share our food. They would have killed us."

Amphan nodded. "They want all the lands, all the old cities—not empty lands the sea left us."

I looked up. "Chettha said it was a failure of the human spirit if he failed with us and the Chin."

Sirikit spat on the snow.

But I remembered the old man, Chettha Dhanarat. I could feel his hands on my head, blessing me. I set down my food and put my hands on my head and held them there.

"They did not give us enough food if we have to watch the night," Amphan said.

I looked up. I had food I could not eat. I took down my hands and handed Amphan my bread and carrot. The others stared at me. I stood and looked out over the battlements at the white plains and the clear, cold sky. By midnight, the temperature might drop to seventy degrees below zero.

"May the Chin freeze," Nuam said.

Many would. Our guerillas burned the Chin tents when they could, and the Chin had burned all wood outside the walls in a fifty kilometer radius. We could still tear wood from the houses inside Bangkok.

Sirikit uncoiled the rope and tied it around my waist. "I'll go down for the Chin coats," she said. "We need them in this cold."

Nuam and Amphan helped me hold the rope. Sirikit climbed down in the snow. I unstrapped my gun, and we kept careful watch. Nothing moved over the snow except gyrfalcons and snowy owls that fluttered away as Sirikit walked toward the bodies. The coats of the men we had dumped oil on were ruined. Sirikit took coats from five other bodies and tied the coats to the rope. We hauled them up. The coats were of good bears' or wolves' fur. Sirikit collected the last two coats and three Chin knives, two quivers of arrows, a bow.

We pulled her up with them. The sun had set, and it was night. I sent Amphan with two of the coats down the stairs to the children's house. "Stay indoors with the children till you hear shouting," I said. She did not argue. Nuam went with her and came up with more wood for the fire.

Nuam, Sirikit, and I put on Chin coats. We built up the fire. I took first watch. Sirikit and Nuam lay down by the fire and wrapped another Chin coat over their legs. They covered their faces so they would not breathe the straight, cold air.

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When the cold hurt, I wrapped my scarf of musk ox wool around my face. Chettha's monks had woven my scarf and shirt from the wool I had carded in Shan. The moon came up, round and bright, surrounded by rings of color: orange, red, blue. It would be very cold. The moonlight made the white plains sparkle as if covered with the dust of jewels. A gyrfalcon flew across the Chao Phyra and out over the plains where the Chin camped.

At one I built up the fire and woke Sirikit. She took my gun. At five it was too cold to sleep anymore. I sat up. Amphan was back, looking over the battlements with Sirikit and Nuam. "We let you sleep," Nuam said.

The moon was low, east of Bangkok. I stood up, walked stiffly to the wall.

And saw the Chin.

Hundreds of Chin stood on the plains, out of bowshot from the walls, open to the wind, quiet, pale in the moonlight, in their white furs. Sirikit handed me my gun.

"Taksin woke me," Amphan said. "They surround Bangkok like this—thousands of them, thousands of Chin."

The Chao Phyra had frozen in the night. "They will walk up the river," I said.

"The ice is new," Sirikit said. "They will still try the walls."

We heard the children laughing. At six, four boys came up the stairs with boxes of food: cheese, roast hams, apples, bread, radishes, fried potatoes. In my box was one bottle of apple brandy and four glasses. Each box even had a tiny rice cake. I had eaten such cakes twice before. The children left, happy, happy to be eating the food we had hoarded so long.

I poured the brandy. The food and brandy took away much of the cold. We put the food we could not eat into one box and set the other three on the fire. They made a bright blaze.

At seven the moon went down. The Chin let out one great shout. The women stood quickly and looked over the walls. Sirikit fit an arrow to her bow. Nuam took up the Chin bow. Amphan drew her knife. I held my gun ready.

But the Chin stood still in the wind, in the drifting snow, in the cold. Bangkok was slowly turning to the sun. The Chin will attack now, before dawn, I thought.

But they did not. The light grew. The Chin shimmered in the predawn haze. I rubbed my eyes—too much brandy, too much good food, not enough sleep, not enough sleep for months. I had not wanted to be tired when the Chin came.

The wind grew with the light. It whipped the snow into stinging bits of ice. We could only squint at the Chin. We had to keep the fire built

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high to keep it alive—it burned so fast in the wind and so much snow blew into it. The wind whipped the hair of the dead Chin below us.

When the first arc of the sun broke above the horizon east of Bangkok, the Chin gave another shout and charged the walls.

"Don't waste arrows!" I shouted above the Chin's shouting. I could fire my gun before Sirikit and Nuam could shoot their arrows. None of the Chin I shot at dropped—the gun was not working. I had no new powerpac to put in it. The Chin skimmed along the tops of the drifts, seldom breaking through the crust. They were at the walls with ladders. I helped Amphan dump oil on a ladder full of men, but the oil crackled only on the bodies of the dead Chin we had shot the night before, did not stop the Chin on the ladder. Sirikit fell back with an arrow in her chest. I knelt to pull it out, but the arrow faded at my touch. Sirikit tore at her clothes to look at her skin. There was no hurt.

The sun was nearly up. We could see the plains before the walls, covered with Chin. I drew my knife and lunged at a Chin coming over the battlements—big, strong, white in his furs—but he was not there. I was not seeing clearly. I had to see clearly. Chin were on the walls. Sirikit, Nuam, Amphan, and I stood together, back to back. Amphan stabbed a Chin with her knife. I tried shooting my gun again. No Chin fell. They circled us, jeering.

"This is a Chin trick!" I said.

The Chin suddenly looked at the sun, looked without shading their eyes. The sun lifted above the horizon. The Chin stared at the sun, shouting again and again. Some of them wept. Amphan put her hands over her ears, but the shouting grew fainter. The Chin began to fade in the light. "You have won," the Chin on the walls with us whispered. "You have won."

The Chin crowded back in the shadows of the battlements and the walls. As the light grew, all the Chin faded and were gone. The plains were empty of Chin. There were no Chin on the plains, no ladders against the walls, no Chin in the shadows. Birds circled the plains over the smokeless Chin camps. Wind sighed across the drifts and hissed in the willows.

A Thai flag was raised, suddenly, above the Chin camp north of us. It fluttered in tatters—white, blue, and green. A great Thai shout went up from the walls of Bangkok. Men and women climbed over the walls and ran toward the Chin camp. Sirikit tied our rope around a merlon, and we climbed down into the snow and ran to the Chin camp.

It was filled with dead, frozen Chin. Some lay alone in the snow. Others lay on top of each other under the scraps of burned tent our guerillas had left them. We stood in the middle of the Chin camp and looked at

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the bodies. I thought of the thousands of Chin we had killed at Chiang Mai, Chainat, Chulalongkorn, and Bangkok.

"The Chin could not admit defeat, even in death," Amphan said.

But we had not defeated them. The cold had, and their lack of food, and their supplies suitable for only a quick campaign designed to take our cities, and their disbelief that we would give them lands the sea had left us.

One dead Chin lay wrapped in yellow robes.

Monks, nurses, children, and old men and women climbed onto the walls of Bangkok and shouted to us, waved to us. Nuam and Amphan waved back.

The tracks of the few Chin who had survived the night led north. Thai guerillas, black specks on the white plains, followed those tracks. The rest of us waited for the army from Ayutthaya-by-the-Sea before going north to find what we would find. In three months it would be spring. We'd need the provinces with their fields of winter wheat.

The women and I pulled coats and boots from the dead Chin and walked back to the walls. Three old women helped pull us up our rope to the top. Nuam picked up the box of food we had not eaten. "We need this now," she said. Sirikit picked up the bows, the quivers of arrows, the knives. I took one of the tins of oil in my left hand. Amphan carried two others. We walked down the stairs.

Children were in the streets, shouting. Old men and women were running to them, hugging them. "We have won," they shouted, happy. I stopped to watch three nine-year-old boys play takraw. Two were good at keeping the ball in the air without using their hands. I had not played takraw for a year. The third boy kicked the ball in my direction. I kicked it back and walked on after Sirikit, Nuam, and Amphan.

We carried our things to the house the army had given us by the wall, then went back to the battlements for the Chin coats, the rope, the pot. Amphan kicked out the fire.

"We should take you to a doctor," Nuam said, looking at my shoulder.

"Later," I said. I only wanted sleep. I only wanted to sleep after fighting the Chin, sleep in a room without shadows where I could not hear old men shout that we had won. ●

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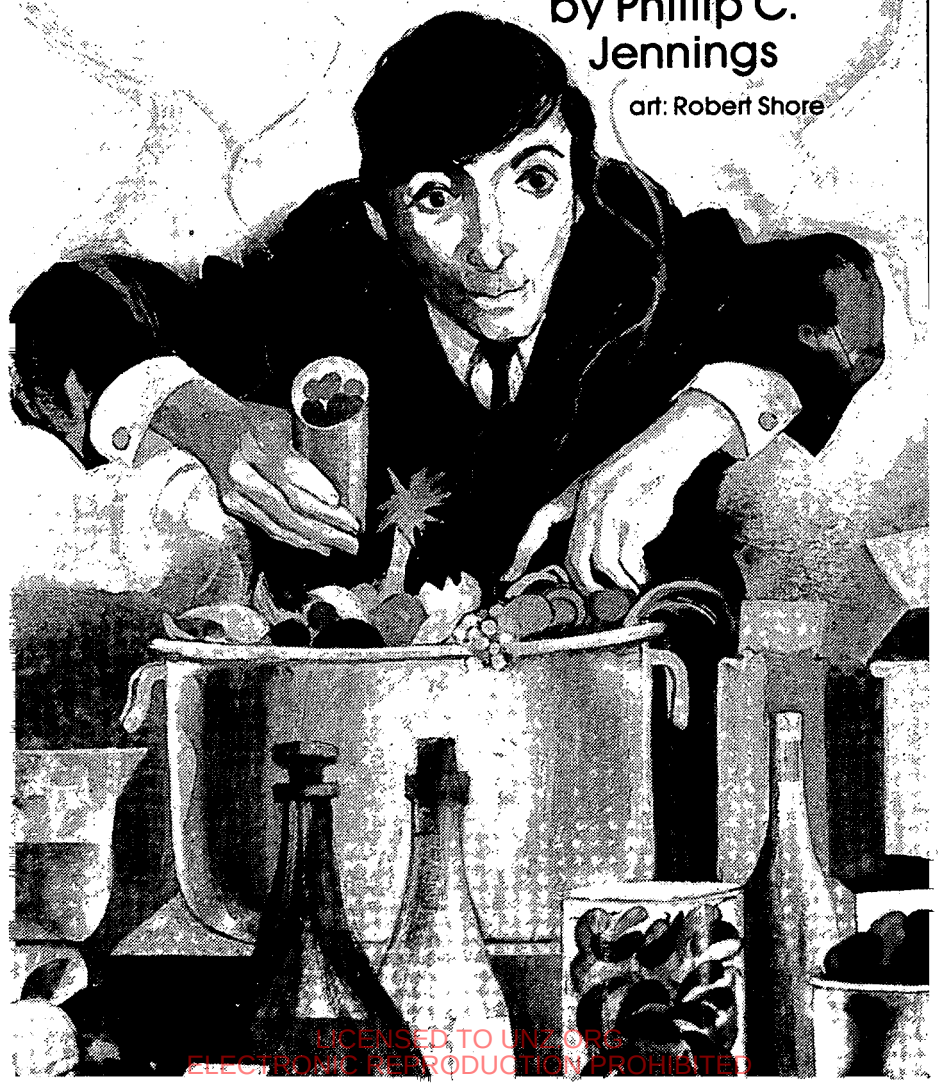
In "Martin's Feast," Phillip C. Jennings has cooked up a savory tale about a man and his unusual dinner. Mr. Jennings' first collection of short stories, *The Bug Life Chronicles*, was recently published by Baen Books.

MARTIN'S FEAST

by Phillip C. Jennings

art: Robert Shore



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Martin began two days earlier by putting several pounds of pork neck into the slow cooker and covering the grisly stuff with water. What cooked out was burrito meat—and a lot of bones for the neighbor's dog.

Large, shaggy, and a bit thick around the middle, Wolfie bore a canine likeness to his benefactor. Martin mixed the pork in with green chilis, raisins, cheese, mole sauce, refried beans, onions, bell peppers, and garlic. There was too much for that night's lonely meal, so he put his leftover mix into the fridge. Then he started some pinto beans to soak. Next day he added them to the broth in the slow cooker.

He thickened it with masa flour, put in half the burrito mix, and then felt his ideas shift from Mexican to Cajun. He hunked up a few pork sausages and plopped them in, then added gumbo file. He sliced in celery and an apple, and a healthy dose of black pepper. Mushrooms? All he had were the white abalone kind and for some reason that wasn't right—he wanted shitake.

Martin smiled at his own fussiness. Cajun-Mexican, with a swing to Japanese. His ideas switched back—a dollop of salsa, some oregano, a bit of tarragon. He gave it more time. Hmm—all that soaking and slow cooking, and the damn beans weren't quite done! In any case the celery and apples floated unattractively on the top.

Martin scooped out the lumps —beans, too —and put them, in the blender. When he emptied the pureed stuff back into the cooker he muttered through his beard: "dog vomit." He reached behind and got out the sherry, thinning the soup liberally. More pepper—wait!

In the fridge from a week ago, the drippings from a baked, herbed chicken, yellow fat on top, brown gelatin below, flecked with spicy green. He scraped off the fat and added the mottled gelatin. It melted in.

Now there was far too much soup for tonight. Martin left the cover off so the brew could thicken. To aid that process he added corn meal and Monterey Jack cheese.

One final voyage for his around-the-world bean soup? A side jaunt to New England? It needed a touch of color, so Martin went to the fridge for some blackstrap molasses. Perfect!

His soup tasted pretty good; flavors blended nicely. Martin ate it with flour tortillas, wishing his wife could be here to share it. But of course there was far too much. It was so substantial that one bowl made a meal.

He put the rest away for tomorrow. The flavors would be even more blended then. He might add the rest of the burrito mixture . . . and do what? Martin smiled. Vague ideas about thickening the result with masa and then baking it . . .

Trying not to think about Lee, he went to bed.

The next morning when Martin went down to the kitchen to make his

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breakfast coffee, he looked into the cooker. Whitish stalks were growing from his leftover meal, ending in bubble-clusters like clumps of grapes. The surface was lozenged by purple zigzag lines growing in from the rim. Only near the stalks were there open ponds of aboriginal soupy brown.

Purple filaments grew inward with visible speed. One of the stalk-bubbles broke with a puff. Particulates scattered, filaments writhed and curled away.

"Tempest in a teapot," Martin muttered, reaching for the telephone.

Sharon's answer was grumpy. "Aren't we in the same time zone?" Martin said in lieu of apology. "At least you've got spring down there. Get out of bed, look out your window and cheer up, then answer some questions. You're my only expert in funguses and I've got a doozy here for you."

"What? You called me up—"

"For one thing, I can see it move. It's the most active little mess I've ever run across. We're talking metabolism here. The other thing is it's fighting a war, white against purple."

Sharon made him describe the details. Martin held the cooker's clear plastic lid like a shield and reported events as they happened. "—Underwater ripples, gathering up and then slurping around those little orange pips—I told you those were new—"

"Water? You mean soup."

"Just this last minute it's gotten less viscous, mostly."

"They're eating it. Martin, is this some bad joke? There's only so much energy in your microcosm, and I can't see that it's enough—what was that?"

"Sounds like—JESUS!" Martin clamped the lid over the cooker. "Sharon, I don't want these things in my house!"

"Is the cooker on by any chance? Is it hot?"

"I wouldn't have—yes, I did. I left it on low. Stupid of me. Hold just a sec, I'll turn it off."

He turned the switch, then patted the cooker and looked puzzled. Moments later he puffed back to the phone. "Okay—"

"You could always send me samples," Sharon conceded over long distance. "Although I don't know what to think. Delirium Tremens or something. Nightmare burping funguses."

"Burp" was the polite term for the sound that continued to rumble out from the cooker. "They also stink. They're getting frenzied in there. Desperate."

"Oh lordy, Martin. If you don't think it's safe—"

"Call you back. I've got a house to defend." Martin slammed down the phone. He scrounged up a heavy glass lid and laid it on top of the plastic one. Hair-thin filaments grew down the outside of the cooker—he found

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some baking soda and flung handfuls at them. They stopped and he jogged to the sink. Dishwasher detergent was the most caustic thing he could find in the space underneath; he made sure the spout was open, rushed back to the cooker, lifted the lids in a hurried one, two; and then poured it in.

The water bubbled, fuzzy structures curled and collapsed. Six feet away Martin's coffee water was ready; the kettle whistled its not-quite-boiling note. He ground some Colombian Supremo and made himself a pot, then sat to drink, his wide eyes ranging the room in aimless focus as he tried to collect his thoughts.

The phone rang. "Sharon? Yeah, I killed 'em. What's left is so disgusting I don't know if I should send it to you. What could you learn anyhow? Like trying to figure out the biology of a tree by looking at the ashes in a fireplace."

"It might not be necessary," Sharon's voice buzzed. "I've got a fix on at least one of those species from what you told me. I mean, we're either dealing with something new and alien, or something familiar that's behaving against the rules. Just on principle I'd like to rule out spores from the stars, and spontaneous generation is even worse. I'd like to think those were perfectly normal ascomycetes that you got hopped up somehow."

"Sharon," Martin interrupted. "—Sharon, I think you should know something. It might not be important, but that cooker felt cold to the touch. Remember when I switched it off? It felt cold when it should have felt warm."

"Maybe it's just you. Maybe . . . Martin? Did you eat any of that stuff? Maybe you better go into the hospital for observation."

"Oh!" Martin sat back. "Wait a minute, I'd be weird already. It was last night's supper, thirteen hours ago. It would happen sooner for me than for some dumb mold, 'cause I've already got a metabolism. Us humans are already hopped up."

"Do you feel sick? The least bit?" Sharon sounded unconvinced.

"I feel cold. You would too if you lived up here. You can pick up a brownstone mansion in Duluth for fifty thousand bucks, but then you have to heat the thing. Coal was cheap when they built this town—"

"Let's keep on track. I want you to call the hospital."

"And tell them what happened here? They'd throw me in mental."

Sharon's pause betrayed her. She might think Martin *belonged* in mental. A man living a temporary bachelor's life, unable to fend for himself (a woman's thinking), probably drinking too much. Had he just imagined those dancing funguses? "I've not gone off the deep end, Sharon. Thanks, and goodbye."

He flicked "off" and carried the handset back to the phone. Now what?

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Sharon would want to do something, but how could she? She didn't know anyone up here, and her college duties tied her down. Besides, traveling from Little Rock to Duluth cost money. Her only choice was to call the hospital herself.

Martin summed up her character and decided. That's what she'd do. He was a little startled at the speed and certainty of his reasoning, but there it was. He added up the time factors. They'd be here in, oh, forty-five minutes.

He carried the cooker to the sink to wash it out.

Filaments. They'd grown according to some mycoplasmic logic, sensing irregularities in the smooth ceramic; the way roads had grown to criss-cross countries in Europe. Roads that took account of landscape and rivers and human needs, Saxon roads—not the straight Roman kind, nor the kind that gridded America's midwest prairies.

The flow of roads, living with human nature, so that even now Europe was pleasant in its urban arrangements, factories put in places naturally unloved and empty rather than artificial industrial parks . . . why was he thinking about this? Usually at this time of morning his mind was barely up to wondering how to use yesterday's leftovers to make today's supper.

His brain had been stimulated by events. Sure, that was it. And now the men in white were coming. How much time left? Martin looked at the clock for the second time this minute. He'd finished scrubbing the cooker—damn fast work. The light came in dim from the windows, more fog.

He was going to tell them a lie; nothing had happened. *Cooker? Bean soup?* Nothing had happened, except it had, and he was the only person in the world with a present opportunity to look into the problem, and he had forty minutes to do so. Er, forty-five—was there something wrong with that damn clock? The second hand wasn't moving right at all!

Let's see. Sharon dismissed the idea of alien organisms. That meant his weird food had worked miracles on something basically normal. Something about the mix of ingredients . . .

There were probably a hundred components to pork sausage—trace it back to everything the pig had eaten and it became impossible, but at least there was another sausage from the same batch in the meat cooler. There was more sherry, too—consider all the elements in cooking sherry!

Martin slumped. Then there was the chicken gelatin. Impossible to reproduce that. He could find the recipe for Lee's Chicken in a Bag and go back to the same farmer for another bird, but he always took liberties with any recipe and undoubtedly had fiddled with a few things. Some combination of ingredients had made super-food, a combination hitherto

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unknown in human history, and now that combination was lost again, possibly forever.

But what could "super-food" mean, and how did it work? It seemed to be getting darker here in the kitchen, so Martin turned on more lights before grabbing the telephone notepad and pen, and sitting down at the table.

Weary from the rigors of travel, Sharon slouched, her shoulder pressing into the kitchen doorframe. Despite what Martin had called her "college duties," she'd flown up from Little Rock when Sergeant Zimrich told her the news; flown, then driven north from the Twin Cities, and then spent half the night in a motel because Zimrich didn't work twenty-four hour days.

"How'd you connect to me?" was her second question after hearing that Martin was nowhere to be found.

"Pushed 'redial' on the man's telephone," the policeman answered.

Zimrich's long-distant voice came in clear enough, but she had some trouble with his accent and style of speech. *"Well, yes, then. I have some ideas, and lots of concerns—I was the one who called the hospital, after all. His wife—you're going to have trouble calling shore to ship."*

"We got experience. Duluth's a seaport," Zimrich answered.

"But Lee's off in the far South Atlantic, doing something hush-hush for Project Survival and I think they're out of touch on purpose. —Okay, you'll need somebody. I'm coming up."

"We're holding his keys at the station. Check in here first," Zimrich said curtly and hung up, a busy man with more than one missing person to think of.

But now, busy as he was, he stood a second time in Martin's kitchen, his pink chipmunk cheeks chapped by months of winter, a man tall enough to walk in a habitual stoop, even inside an old high-ceilinged mansion. Zimrich looked through the door to where Sharon had dropped her luggage. "You with this Survival bunch, too?" he asked, and then: "Planning to stay here?"

Porcelain skin, slender features, and present fatigue all added up to one impression: fragility. Unfortunately the impression was true. Sharon loathed exercise. Slim at a hundred ten pounds, her clothes concealed a tiny potbelly and wobbly triceps.

To compensate, when she spoke she spoke tough. "Martin vanished between seven forty-five and eight thirty yesterday morning. It had nothing to do with any organization. He ingested something, called me, and I called the hospital. I've been a houseguest here before: if Lee or Martin were home they'd certainly ask me to stay. Don't worry, I'll take care of

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the place. The way you all tore open the lock means somebody needs to guard the door till it gets fixed."

Unable to give or deny permission, Zimrich lifted his hat and scratched his head. The pause gave him time to absorb Sharon's rapid talk. When he'd done so he moved to the table. "We found this. It looks like secret code or something."

Sharon moved into the room and bent to look. "Music. He was—He *is* a composer. Symphonies, high-class space music. You don't recognize these scribbles because you don't use a synthesizer. There's all sorts of symbols that don't make it into church hymnals."

Zimrich nodded. "Yep. Only—ma'am, I've seen his equipment upstairs. We've got computers, too, back at the station. Here's how it is. A guy gets all those gizmos and he ends up working at the keyboard. Paper and pencil grow obsolete. So why does your friend leave all his gear turned off, and go downstairs and write music on a telephone notepad?"

"That's all he wrote?"

Zimrich picked up the pad and held it edge on to search for dints made by previous writing. " 'Meta'—something. 'Translate cold.' Sorry, it doesn't make sense."

"Well then . . . Sergeant, Martin and I met at college. I even introduced him to Lee—she was my roommate. He majored in music and I took some courses. If there's any clues from this page I can mess with his equipment and get it to play. I work with electronics at a biolab down in Little Rock; I can do it."

Zimrich looked sad. "Ma'am, you know what we're gonna find. The guy took this poison food you told the hospital about, and he got crazy and ran outside. If we haven't found him yet it's because we've got woods at the edge of town and he went off that way."

He saw Sharon's face fall and went on apologetically—"Not that you should get involved with the hunt, because you don't know this area, so like you say maybe you can pick up some clues around the house." He patted her shoulder. "Now don't you worry. As soon as we find him we'll call. I've got the number here."

"And I've got *your* number," Sharon answered cryptically, too tired to be angry at the policeman's condescension. Zimrich moved to the door, touched his hat, and stooped out through a foyer built like an Edwardian airlock. Sharon saw him blink in watery sunlight and smile at mild upper-forties weather before jogging down the steps to his car.

He doesn't even bother to zip his jacket! She shivered and turned from the window. She took the notepad and labored upstairs, sure that Martin's scribbled music had a meaning: *"If you're a friend close enough to understand me, I've got something for you."*

All the lights were on in Martin's workshop—Sharon's mind conjured

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the image of invading police, carefully not touching the switches. If that were true they'd been on since yesterday morning—but it might not be true; there were signs of riot on the second floor, loose banister, holes in the plaster, bedroom door torn from its hinges.

She sat in her friend's chair, leaned back, and swiveled, looking at a room that had much in common with the cockpit of a DC-10. The first ON switch she tried didn't do anything. She traced the thing's cord through a mare's nest to a box labeled "Line Conditioner." She flipped MASTER and her surroundings came alive, a riot of green bars, amber flashes, glowing red blips, and cool soothing blues.

The tape drive whirled: a shrill high gibber came out of the speakers. This couldn't be music, no matter how dissonant or avant-garde. She studied the drive unit. It had expensive options to aid in splicing, including a knob that read RITARD at one end and ACCEL at the other.

She swung it to RITARD. "--ssSSHRIEEEEBEELTEEyrch ntilitbe-came clear that I'd never be able to reconstruct thaat soooooooo-oo-o-uuup," (another adjustment) "--buut anyhow you've got my best guess at the ingredients so you can try if you like."

(pause) "Excuse me, I'm trying to be brave," Martin's voice continued. "Tell Lee I love her. I don't know what's worse, burning out and dying, or just continuing like this and getting worse, so jazzed with hellish vitality I might be unkillable. I can't see anymore, just a little dim red solar disk out the window. And like I said, it's so t-t-terribly cold!

"I'm trying to imagine the effect I'm having on my environment, moving so fast, more than ten times normal at the very least. My thoughts are moving fast, too. I wish I had more of an education in physics, because cleverness doesn't count if the foundation isn't there. —Sharon? Maybe you can help me. I remember stuff about mechanical energy, and chemical energy, and electrical energy, and how when one gets converted to the other, the waste product is heat. It's like heat is the lowest common denominator, the basement of the whole system. Is that right?

"Well, I've fallen through that basement. There was something in my soup, some enzyme or funny kind of sugar, or some broken-down protein that recombined in some new illegal way. My cells used to be like yours, my body was a slow fire that burned food, and I could keep going on a miserable two thousand calories a day, only now I'm alive with a new kind of fire that burns heat, and I don't even know what the waste product could be."

click *click* "Sorry, just checking," Martin's voice continued. "I'm not radioactive, not enough to register, otherwise I'd fog this tape and you couldn't hear me. No, I'm not radioactive, I didn't think I would be. This new force I'm exploiting probably lies in the other direction—like

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I say it's down from the basement, and all those fancy physicist's forces are up high in the tower.

"So anyhow, there's lots of heat to eat, even in Duluth in April—three or four hundred degrees above absolute zero, but my senses are set up for how I used to be, and I feel *cold!* This thing is going to kill me, it's too rich for me, it's got me racing, and blind in the dark and cold—but if it doesn't kill me, I don't have any choice. I've got to move south. I'll be slow—maybe only a hundred miles an hour, because I'll be picking my way by feel unless there's direct sunlight, and I don't want to hurt anything. All you solid, real-time things are less substantial than you used to be, and I have to be s-s-super careful."

And that was it. Sharon let the tape spin on, but apparently Martin had said his piece. She scowled. She taught an undergraduate course, biology for non-scientists, and she was used to wild metaphors. Talk of double helixes spawned questions about single and quadruple helixes, as if the ability to assemble words meant that the phenomenon was possible.

This phenomenon clearly wasn't. Poor Martin, crazed somehow, out in the woods lurching toward warmer weather, convinced he was—wait a minute! He'd recorded his tape message at high speed, right? Higher than was humanly possible.

Unless—fraud? Deception via the ACCEL function? Why? To get her to come up here? Lonely man, sexually frustrated without his wife—but knowing Martin as well as she did, Sharon knew such deceit was impossible.

"That's right, I hoped you'd think that," came Martin's voice. Sharon spun around, twiddled RITARD/ACCEL, and turned him from tenor to bass. "Did I startle you? I know you well enough to build a little Sharon in my head, and now that I'm a genius I can d-d-do that."

He paused to control the chattering of his teeth. "Here's another dumb idea. Big Bang, remember? Universe buh-born and immediately starts to cool and crystallize. Umpteen dimensions curl in on themselves, and the cosmos's one unified force begins to break up into things like gravity and all those other factors; weak and strong and so forth.

"So now the universe has cooled to 3.7 degrees absolute. Who's to say the process is over? Maybe there's a *new* splintering of forces going on, a new force like magic coming into intermittent play!"

Another pause. "—*Oh Jesus*, matches don't light for me anymore; the friction heat vanishes too soon. This curse is getting stronger. Sharon, the little Sharon in my mind says 'bullshit.' How can I prove myself to you? Not that proving myself has top priority. I've gotta go, Sharon. Is Death Valley the hottest place on this continent? I think so, or maybe

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it's just the United States. I'm really off this time. If you need me and I'm alive, Death Valley's your best bet."

This time Sharon waited expectantly, nor was she disappointed.

click—Martin was a tenor again, and there was no more room to RITARD. "My checkbook and wallet are under my socks in the bedroom dresser," he shrilled. "My magic money code is S, O, N, G—take the card. I've tried writing a check to you for $5000 to cover your expenses—for me it's like writing on Kleenex in the dark but I hope it'll pass muster. Don't feel guilty about taking my money it's no good to me anymore and Lee's got an inheritance that won't quit. Besides I've put you toalot of trouble evenif you can't work Death Valley in. I'm not sure whyI want to see you there cepta fewdays foryou r'months forme soany message you getisgoingtobefrom aman withawholeneweducation.Byenow."

She let the tape play to the end. During the rewind she went to Martin's bedroom and plundered among his socks. Then she returned to the workroom, ran the tape again and took notes.

She went down to the basement to find a picnic cooler. She layered in some ice chunks from the freezer, then heaved it upstairs to the kitchen, wishing she had a grad student/slave at hand to do the muscle work she despised. After a rest she loaded in an apple, a sausage, and Martin's cooking sherry, plus samples among his spices.

Then she left a note for Sergeant Zimrich. "Play tape upstairs. Will get to Death Valley after return trip to Little Rock." It sounded better than the truth:

"Will *think* about Death Valley on the way down, but testing Martin's foods gives me a real good excuse to shift priorities, and then there's my teaching schedule to lock me in, and I don't like trusting lab hirelings to run my experiments."

Frank was one of those hirelings; a so-called "technician." Common refrigerator mold had migrated via spores in his beard to ruin three week's worth last year, all because his live-in girlfriend neglected to throw out some old cottage cheese. As Sharon packed into her car her mind cycled among such horror stories, all calculated to keep her home where she belonged, where she had duties . . .

She let her mind go clear on the drive down to Minneapolis. In the airport she bought a ticket for a return via Memphis—so tightly timed she barely got to page two of the *Star Tribune* before the steward announced that flight 113A was ready to board.

Page two had an article about the coming South African bomb test, and protest efforts by Project Survival—which included *sailing into the test zone.* Sharon grimaced and thought of Lee on board that ship. Poor bullshitter Martin was someone who could keep her love, therefore he deserved more credit than Sharon had grudged him so far.

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She might try thinking seriously about his ideas. What else was there to do on an airplane? Somebody had snatched the *New Yorker* and the *Harper's* was two issues old.

Minutes later they were airborne. Sharon leaned back. *So?*

After the Big Bang the universe cooled. Structures appeared that could not have survived the initial heat. In time those structures became embedded in other structures. Atomic particles got locked into atoms. Then atoms got locked into molecules, and molecules—?

Life was an example of a system in which molecules were locked.

To what extent is an atomic particle aware that it's not free-floating anymore? Sharon wasn't enough of a physicist to answer that question; it had to do with subatomic behavior, not with consciousness.

She dismissed it and moved on. *I made mock of Martin's ideas because metabolism is a complex thing. You can't run a steam engine on gasoline, and his idea that some new protein had converted him—no, proteins are too simple for such a giant undertaking.*

But . . . but suppose a cooling universe was ready to support structures more complicated than life. Wouldn't such structures use living things as their building blocks?

If this phenomenon was possible, it had happened before and would happen again. Notice would be taken—of heatloving, dancing creatures, dustdevils to be propitiated because of the damage they could do. Except those things would be of such scale that a normal eye could only see glimpses—atoms only see atoms, and molecules don't register.

Likewise for the other side. Martin was in a new world now, involved in complexities beyond Sharon's understanding, complexities much more important to his existence than anything from before his transformation. He'd soon learn that truth, if he hadn't learned it already.

He'd be as uninterested in a Death Valley rendezvous as she was loathe to go.

"You'd almost expect to see angels," said the lady belted in at Sharon's side, speaking across the empty seat between them.

Sharon's eyes widened as she turned. *"What?"*

The lady smiled as if it were a preliminary required by etiquette, not a false smile exactly, but payment for the offense of interrupting Sharon's thoughts. She gestured and her bracelets clacked together. "Out there. All those white fleecy clouds. Angels with harps."

"Umm—yes." Yes; angels, devils, gods. Fire elementals, salamanders, djinn, efreets. Sharon's ex-boyfriend was Islamic; for him the people of this world were divided into People of the Book, and *Fire-worshippers.*

Fire-worshippers? Using heat to summon the gods?

The lady patted her hair, took in a deep breath and let it out in a sigh.

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"It's hard to believe. The world looks so peaceful, and yet there are those South Africans ready to set off their bomb."

Sharon gave her a friendly look to cover her conversational deficiencies; return payment in this airborne traffic of smiles. "They don't dare. They'd kill Americans, and there'd be bad publicity."

"I don't think they *care* about publicity, do you?"

Sharon shrugged. She bent for her newspaper and gave the article a second look. "Oh gosh, it's set for next Monday."

The more she read, the more the protesters' "Project Survival" seemed like Project Suicide. When she got to Little Rock, Sharon went to her bank, then drove back east to the airport and bought a ticket for Las Vegas.

Thursday, Friday . . .

"Damned funniest thing," said the man at the concession stand. "Oh yeah, we're used to temperature drops at night, even frost sometimes, but daytime readings in the *sixties?*"

"It's the greenhouse effect," said a fat tourist in multi-colored shorts, walking up to the register clutching a two-liter bottle of Diet Mandarin Orange Slice.

The man squinted back, fiftyish and leathery, all his water-weight squeezed out like someone halfway to being mummified. "That's supposed to make things hotter, not colder," he retorted, giving evidence of an education beyond his present station in life. "Two-bucks-with-tax. Now see that sun? Nobody's turned it off, so what do you figure?"

"I need to make a big bonfire," Sharon interrupted from behind. The fat tourist shuffled sideways to give her room. "Wood, kerosene, old fireworks—whatever you've got."

The man scratched his cropped head, then brightened. "Lady, I've got kerosene, and wax—you pay for it and you can burn it. Use one of the wire trash bins at one of the parking lots and don't tell anybody in uniform I handed you any criminal advice." He turned and spat. "Used to be a free country. Now you go up to where they've got the camper cabins north from here, and they'll sell you fireplace wood—"

"And then I'm coming back. This is supposed to be Death Valley's hot spot, right? The very heart of hell?"

The man grew glum. "Used to sell pop by the barrel up until a few days ago."

"I'm going to fix that," Sharon said. "That's what the bonfire's going to do." She grinned as she went on: this was California, wasn't it? They'd lock her up back in Bible Belt Arkansas, but here the same Christians would just take pictures and giggle about all the kooks. "—I'm going to

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have a ceremony, and propitiate a god, and then the weather will be normal again."

Sharon's next eight hours were busy ones for her rental car. Under the concessionaire's eyes her plans matured. The area he called "out back" was as much Park land as anywhere else, but he used it as a yard and felt entitled to let her pile imported wood onto a brown and hardened spot where his predecessor had once burned his trash.

He knew a good thing when he saw it; Sharon's "ceremony" was already drawing an extra bit of business.

Kidnap Rhoda Morgenstern from the TV show, force-feed her to a hundred eighty pounds, and put on too much make-up. The result was lurking on the periphery that evening as Sharon arranged her firewood in a great circle; a Rhoda in exotic hat and cape, readying her flute.

She was there, and also a blond beach-boyish hunk with unsmiling eyes, powerfully built, a True Believer of unknown type whose young family sat quietly in the truck. Neither he nor the Rhoda-gypsy spoke; all the talking was done by an old geezer in a motorized wheelchair—even old men wore shorts out here in Sunset Magazine country.

The man was sunk-chested and potbellied, and had the loud bark of a drill sergeant. He told Sharon exactly how to set up the altar and arrange the wood for the fire. He paid for the butter out of his own pocket when the concessionaire ran back around the building to peddle it as a new combustible.

"DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR NOTEPAD," the old man bellowed encouragingly. "IF YOU WANT YOUR WORDS READ, YOU GOTTA LEAVE THEM RIGHT ON THE ALTAR, RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE."

Obviously Sharon wasn't the only fire-worshipper in Southern California—but given the dearth of population hereabouts these three made up her entire congregation.

The sun finished setting. At Sharon's signal, high-beams shot on and inward, three trucks and two cars creating a crisscross island of light. Squinting against their dazzle, Sharon sprinkled on the kerosene, and tossed a lit match into the ring. "SVAHA!" the old geezer barked, startling her as much as the *whap* of a swiftly-catching blaze. Both happened at once, and then the lady with the flute started to play.

Heat built up, rippling the air. The Rhoda-clone capered heavily; the blond hunk raised hands, closed his eyes, and whispered. There was a rumble of approaching thunder, then suddenly they were all enveloped in a chill whirlwind. The storm-tossed fire turned an unhealthy color and guttered, the pages of Sharon's sacrificed notebook flapped on the small pile of stones that was her altar—flapped so violently she expected the book to loft up and fly off in the wind.

"THE FIRE BURNED, AND YET THE BUSH WAS NOT CON-

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SUMED!" the geezer roared, but there was no great mystery to the present miracle, for in many places around the ring the sickened fire had simply snuffed out. The resulting smoke obscured the altar, whirling up and then outward to contribute to the haze of dust.

In that haze danced too many shadows.

Suddenly the breeze died. Dust settled, and the fire started to prosper again. Sharon's notebook was gone from the altar. "If you can remember your love for Lee," her words began in large block letters, and then went on: place and date, and the temperature at the heart of a nuclear explosion.

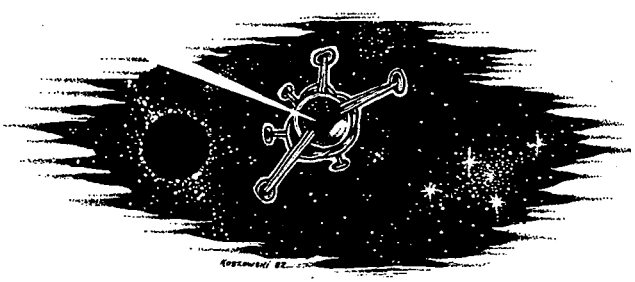
But was it possible? Could even a god eat gamma rays? Where was Martin's answer? She'd asked "Walk on ocean?" in hopes Martin could write her back—just a sign. Anything! But for him this world must now be so dim, so fragile and crystalline . . . crystal. Writing with cold. Freezing out a giant word or two.

Sharon jogged to the geezer's side, grabbed his flashlight, and ran out beyond the crosshatched lights. *Thank you, oh battery pagan, your wheelchair arms draped with gear* . . . She stabbed the darkness, and lashed it, circling until she saw the white gleam of hoarfrost on what had once been sunbaked dirt.

The message lay oriented toward the fire. YES, it began. WE WALK EAT. So many reasons for baby-talk; too many words and the first would melt before the last was written.

But—YES WE WALK EAT! "We," meaning Martin had found company among the djinn. Sharon turned away, her soul singing with relief at the accomplishment of her duties. She trudged to lean on her rental car and wait for the pounding in her heart to settle down. The gods had intervened in human history in earlier times, and they'd intervene again. Let the details take care of themselves; the humiliation of government scientists, the protests of an angry world led by would-be martyrs who were nevertheless still alive . . .

The fizzling of a bomb whose stolen energies would feast Martin in an orgy of heat beyond all dreams. ●



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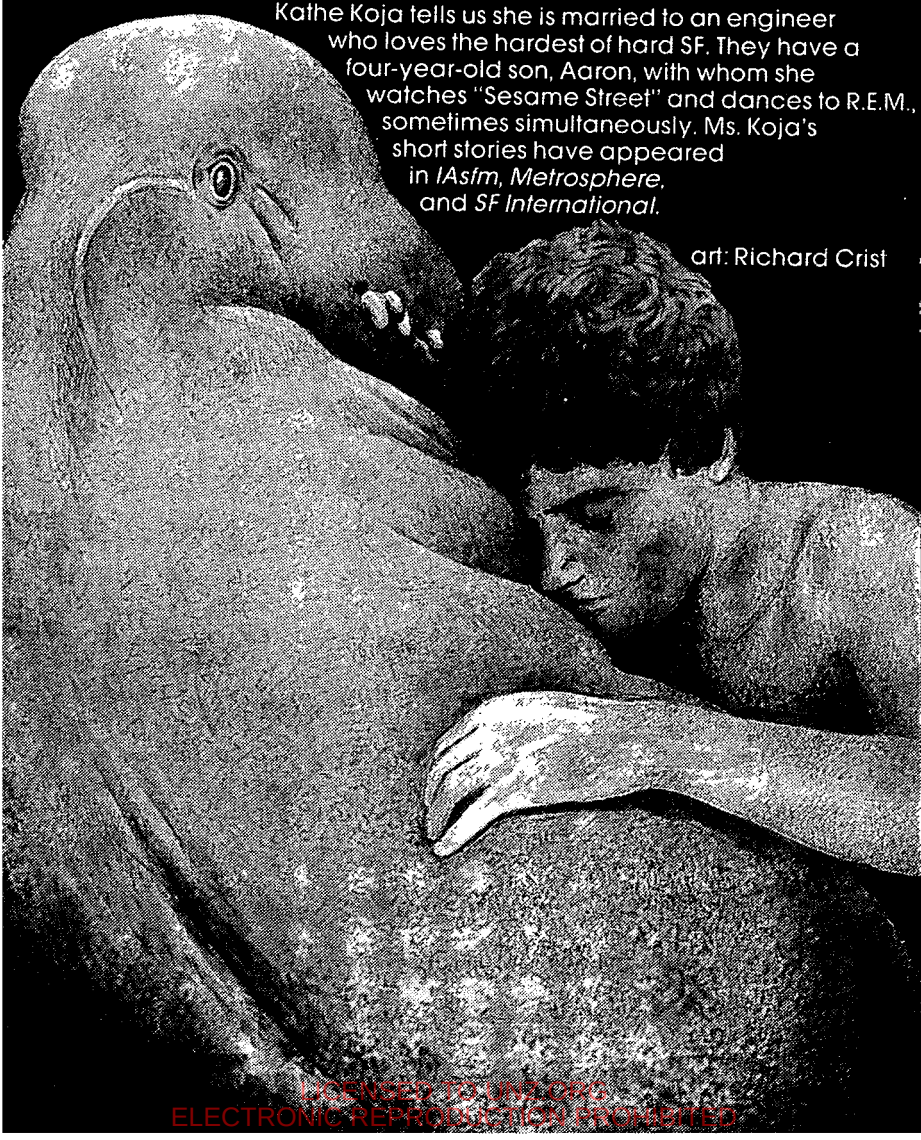
SKIN DEEP

by Kathe Koja

Kathe Koja tells us she is married to an engineer who loves the hardest of hard SF. They have a four-year-old son, Aaron, with whom she watches "Sesame Street" and dances to R.E.M., sometimes simultaneously. Ms. Koja's short stories have appeared in *IAsfm*, *Metrosphere*, and *SF International*.

art: Richard Crist



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The morning, air like steam curling wetly down his throat—the daily bastard rush of the heat: there was no getting used to it, not for him anyway. Skin moist and mushy, like staying too long in the shower, hair always frizzy-slick, always sticking to something, breath like water in his mouth. The bed was a lake of last night's dreamy sweat, so Taylor sat up to smoke a handrolled cigarette, two fingers absently brushing the puckering sores on his chest and neck; there were more, on his buttocks and thighs. They didn't hurt. He put out the cigarette, other hand flapping on the nightstand for his glasses: flimsy things, round-lensed with plain pale glass. It pleased him to affect such a quaintness; it gratified his growing sense of the grotesque.

He dressed in the bathroom, pulling clothes from the shower curtain rod. A rich mold had begun in the tub. He ignored it. Shoes, keys, cigarettes, out the door.

The woman at the doughnut shop: "Hey-hey, Blondie," she always called him Blondie, "lookin' a li'l worn out today, huh? Big night last night?"

"The biggest." Spatulate silver tongs, heavy brown doughnuts creamy with grease; she put three in the bag, added an anemic danish, squeezed his fingers as he paid. Outside it was hotter than ever and not even noon. The air conditioner in his car hadn't worked since January.

Parking, the doughnut bag sagged against his bare thigh; it made him shiver. Her building was old, one of the oldest on the block, and that was saying something. No security, no buzzers, no elevator: no notion, in those days, of such niceties. As he doubletimed it up the stairs, new sweat drizzled on his sores, starting a soft throb in rhythm with his heart, beating too fast for the mere exertion of climbing. His hard knock on the door pushed it open.

"Here," his voice gluey in his throat, thick with anticipation, "I brought you something sweet," and he proffered the bag to where she lay, there in the corner between the TV and the unused bed, all of her pulsing, a faint visible vibration, her color the sweet pink sheen of a baby's mouth, shading to a delicate violet as he gave her the bag, and, in the giving, tore it. Fatty chocolate, the hungry glow of her, and he was hungry, too; oh yes. Keys, he dropped them, shoes off, shirt off in one motion and shorts in the other, sores throbbing, hard-on aching, and fell upon her, literally, entirely, eyes closed and mouth open, sucking in her smell, enveloped in her, her name wet in his throat.

He cried out when he came, a breathless spent sob of pleasure, and she generated her special purr, a basso that tickled his bones. With his free hand, he rubbed at the sweat on his face, blew out breath like a swimmer: whoo! One of the doughnuts had rolled under the TV stand, and he fished it back with one foot. "Here," and she ate it, the operation

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as always a queasy thing to watch: so many *teeth*, and all of them like—what? rubber? spines? Anemone teeth, yeah. "Good?" and she told him yes, it was very good.

He lay in her for a while, mindless enjoyment of her rich buoyancy, talking quietly as she purred, until inevitably he stiffened again, and again she made him cry. On the TV, an earnest white man implored him to SEEK HOME PROTECTION, PLEASE! before a backdrop of window bars worthy of vanished Spandau. Then the credits for "Another World," and he sat up, dizzied, wiping more sweat. Time to go, but he dallied, fingerfed her the last crumbs, talked more daily nonsense, took two exhausted bites of the cheese danish; it lay like lead in his mouth.

"Trish," swallowing with difficulty, "Trisha, I have to go now." He stroked her, rubbing skin between fingers, loving, again, the sheer *feel* of her. "Tomorrow?"

She gave him to understand No; with the usual complicated juju, she made him understand *Thursday*, and he frowned, defeated by the thought of two whole empty days. He dressed, holding a chairback for support; dizzy again, with the exertion and the heat she loved. "Bye, babe," he said, made proud by her soft drowsy sounds. "I'll be back on Thursday, okay? Bye," and he walked downstairs like an old man, the new sores seeping gently through his shirt.

Her name was no more Trisha than his was the sounds she made when she saw him, but they had to call each other *some*thing. He had been seeing her for six months, time enough for shamefaced urge to become urgent complacency: every three days at least, shine, rain, or hurricane. Time enough too to stop questioning, aside from the lingering idle wonder of what the hell?

He had come upon her (ho ho) by silly accident. A friend, bitterly bitching about an old girlfriend and his hostage wardrobe still at her place, and he, Taylor, paying back an old favor: "I'll get it back for you, man," chuckling all the way to the broken-down apartment building, chuckling as he turned the friend's purloined key, choking on his chuckle as he saw the new tenant. Skinned his hand raw on the bannister, fell one-kneed and cursing into the afternoon heat of the street, went back and told his friend Get your own fuckin' clothes! He suppressed the part about the living lump of twinkling flesh; no sense in having people look funny at you, friends, police, board of health, whoever.

Had she drawn him back, after so inauspicious a meeting? He'd toyed with that thought later, for otherwise how explain his *next* visit? Bowstring tight, sneaks poised for the first one-minute mile, opening the door like the girl in a horror movie whom the audience jeers for her mindless courage.

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"Still there," he'd mumbled through tight teeth, "still fucking *in* there," but nothing happened. He stared, panting, exquisitely cautious. The lump moved. He was gone.

He came back. This time the lump looked—oh shit, forlorn? Stupid, but strangely true. That time he'd stayed long enough to learn something even stranger: it was a very smart lump; it was not really a lump; it was a female. (A female *what*, the jury was still out on that one.) But finding out it, *she*, was intelligent lessened his fear, and finding that she could *talk*, after her fashion, and he understand after his, lessened it further. By the end of a week he was feeding her, day-old bread and stale doughnuts, giddy with his own bravery, proud of his bizarre adventure.

The direction it took seemed laughably preordained, later—she *was* a *girl*, right? An accident, a stumble as he adjusted the TV for her (she liked TV, any TV) and his bare foot brushed her bulk. He had literally jumped, startled beyond fear at the sheer *difference* of it, the purely—say it—*alien* feel of her. And beyond the shock, like an echo: pleasure. Only a whisper of what she could give, but enough even then to intrigue him. Pig for it, he'd mocked himself nervously, and to the undercurrent of her encouragement touched her again. And again. And again, so caught up in the strangeness that his orgasm, when it happened, was almost a surprise; his sticky shorts rode home with him as testimony. You're *sick*, he'd told himself, half-laughing, half-guilty, you'll fuck *anything*.

The first sores had horrified him. Oh shit I got the alien AIDS, worse than AIDS, I know it is, and he drove there barefoot and shirtless, confronted her in a terror so great he was nearly in tears. She waited out his hysteria, then explained, in her wordless patient way, that the sores were harmless, a by-product of sorts of the meeting of their disparate skins. Comfort came from her in tsunami waves, and he wept with relief, believing her utterly. Harmless, she said *harmless*, and with a different sort of relief, he shed his jeans.

The biggest questions—what, how—she ignored, or could not answer. His curiosity was very great at first, but when she grew agitated, her color changing, her underbelly swelling like a bullfrog's throat, he stopped asking, instead tried to calm her down. After a while he even stopped caring, though he wondered how she fared on the days he did not visit—their times together regulated, always, by *her* choice: apparently she prized her privacy—and how she fed. He wondered, too, who owned the building and why he didn't come calling for tardy rent. Of course, she'd be daunting—she'd daunted the hell out of him, hadn't she? And she was being *nice*. About this too he stopped caring; somebody else's problem, after all.

As his visits progressed, the day-old treats became freshly-baked (she had a glutton's passion for chocolate), the talks less perfunctory and more

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intimate, the intimacies more profound. It was a cliché, but he could talk to her about anything, absolutely anything: she was interested in whatever he had to say, at any length. She was soothing when he needed to be soothed, exciting when he wanted stimulation, silent when quiet was what he craved. And she was so easy to please, her wants minimal. Because that was so, he did more than she asked, brought sweeter treats, cleaned the apartment (while his own place grew more moldy by the day), brought rabbit-ears for the TV when the reception grew balky; he wanted to pay for cable, but neither could figure out a way for installation without unwelcome discovery, so she had to make do with network. Never mind, she said: she loved the soaps, could recite their byzantine intrigues by the hour, a litany of names like Tracey and Reva and Nola: she did it sometimes to amuse him. Her favorite character was called Trisha, and so he called her that; the name pleased her very much.

If someone had pointed out to Taylor that he had become obsessed, he would have laughed, but the truth was that there was little else in his life anymore but her. He had no time for other friends—he was either anticipating the next visit or recovering from the last one—and his bar-hopping nights seemed, now, a waste of time. A waste of time, too, his job at the video store, reluctant manager to bored clerks; he could not afford to quit, but did the minimum, sliding by. His apartment looked like a garbage can. (He joked, in a tentative way, about moving in with her; her instant negative surprised and wounded him. They never spoke of it again.)

He wanted to come more often: every day, if possible. Not possible, she told him, agitation riding beneath her calm refusal. "Every other day then," he said, trying for a light request, surprised himself by the anxious demand of his voice. "C'mon, that's okay, isn't it? *Isn't* it?"

When *I* say, she said, and would not discuss it. That day she was particularly loving, but he was angry and refused to be placated. He left without asking when he might come back, and stayed away for four straight days. When he returned, on the morning of the fifth day, he was half in tears; he could not understand why she would not grant him more time.

He sat in his dark apartment, the TV on without sound, drinking lukewarm beer, absently fingering his sores. Was she growing bored with him? She *seemed* happy, but how could he know? He was at the mercy of her disclosures, and she said nothing about herself; all they talked of was him. How to find out? She would not answer willingly. Force was out of the question, and in any case, he could never bring himself to hurt her; even to think of threatening her made him feel sick. He drank another beer, two, four, and fell asleep with his mouth open. His dreams were of her.

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He did not ask again, did not even bring up the subject. But it festered, making him one time sullen, the next almost unctuous. In their times apart, he sat imagining, angrily wondering what solitude provided that *he* could not. Inevitably his imaginings grew redder, and he came to believe it was not her need for solitude that kept him frustrated and at bay.

It was after a long night of stale beer that he began to watch her building. Not spying, he told himself, just—watching. His beachhead was the greasy spoon across the street from her building, its windows bleary with old fumes, its counter permanently scarred like the veteran of some dire chemical war. He sat there, waiting out the breakfast rush, waiting for a seat by the farthest window. When it emptied, he took his coffee and toast and established himself there, pretending to read the paper. It was a B-movie move, but nothing better suggested itself: if he sat there openly staring, they would make him leave.

He drank his coffee, ate his toast so slowly it hardened. He rested his elbows on the headlines and watched, but nothing happened that he could even remotely connect to Trisha: people left the building, others came: a man in khaki shorts and a red T-shirt, a fat man in an ancient summer suit, a woman in a mottled tank dress. The woman had a halfass furtive air, but maybe that was just his imagination. Besides, what would a woman have to do with Trisha? What would *any* of them? Asshole, he told himself, go home. And he did.

But he came back, kept coming. He became a regular, quiet and surly in his window booth. One morning, parking, another idea, child of frustration, had birth: forget the greasy spoon, he would watch from *inside* her building. No one would question or even wonder; it was not a place where motives were asked. He took the paper and a can of beer, and settled in the aching heat at the top of the stairs, sipping, sweating, waiting.

It was an hour, maybe two—he wore no watch—when he heard her, not speaking, unmistakable: somehow she *knew* he was there, and was calling him. Peremptory, almost angry—Trisha, angry with *him*! He went to her—there was no way not to—and saw her wear a darker color than he had ever seen before, a deep coral flush. The surface of her seemed to glitter, and her voice was higher, less understandable.

She told him to stop it. Stop it *now*.

"Stop what?" but he was obviously guilty; he was flushing, too. *And* angry, angry as she. "It's a free fucking country, isn't it?" and more, getting louder and less coherent, until she ordered, *ordered*, him away: go home, she said, almost red now, never do this again. And unspoken, unspeakable, the threat that she would send him away for good. "Go to hell," he shrieked, and hurled the nearest thing—a cracked plastic ash-

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tray full of old butts; it did not hit her, but the ashes sifted down to settle on her skin. He slammed out, ran down the stairs, drove off with much squealing of tires and open-window cursing. He was badly frightened: of banishment, of the impossibility of never seeing her, never having her again. Frightened not of her anger, but at what had prompted it; instinct had been right; there was more than privacy at stake here.

He went back. He had to; even the risk was less than the need to know. More cunning this time, he hid on the ground floor, sitting beerless, solemn and immobile in the greenish shadow of the door, determined to wait all day and all night, to wait until an answer came. The heat seemed more brutal, or perhaps that was his fear.

Not so many people in-and-out today. The khaki-shorts guy, as usual, hurrying past without a glance, hurrying up the stairs. He followed, very very quietly, creeping like an insect to the top of the stairs. Khaki Shorts went down her hallway; Khaki Shorts, my God! Khaki Shorts went *inside* her apartment. Without knocking! Without a key!

It was hard to breathe, all of a sudden, hard to stand. Sweat ran down his sides. His sores tingled. Without knowing he did it, he turned her doorknob, with one lurching motion slammed open her door. He stood in the doorway unmoving, unspeaking, *seeing*.

Khaki Shorts was already out of them, one naked sore-spotted leg already resting on Trisha's sweet pink bulk, erection rapidly wilting at the sight of Taylor in the doorway. "What the *fuck?*" said Khaki Shorts, and in one lunge Taylor grabbed him by the arm and punched him solidly in the face, punched him again before an answering punch knocked his own air away. He fell back, landing square on his ass, a comical pose. Trisha's brick-red color was grimmer than anything she might have said. Khaki Shorts was bellowing "What the fuck's your *problem*, man? You her *pimp* or something, man?" and Taylor got up, shaking his head, his mouth hanging open, staring like a walking lobotomy, and kneed Khaki Shorts as he dressed; a motion of perfect violence, perfectly executed. Khaki Shorts let out a mumbled grunt and vomited, down on one knee, and Taylor turned and left.

Driving home he cried, still open-mouthed, sick with a grief he could not control, empty of all rage: this was far too serious for stupid anger. You her pimp, man? You her *pimp*, man? He drove past his own apartment, had to turn around and go back. Inside he sat staring down at his hands, his shaking hands. He sat that way until it grew dark, then light again. His hands had stopped shaking. He knew what he had to do.

He parked across from her building, left the keys in the car. His walk was brisk, unhurried. There was no expression on his face. He opened her door on a woman with bright blonde hair and sagging breasts, her pulpish body bright with sores: "Don't mind me," he said, voice too flat

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but void of threat. "Just go on," and he went into the bathroom and carefully closed the door.

The woman left at once, and Trisha's command came to him, ominous and cool. He was not afraid. He left the bathroom, came to sit beside her. She was a fierce tomato color, and her teeth were exposed.

"I love you," he said, very calmly. "But I can't share you."

She did not answer, but slowly, too slowly to track, she went from red to pink again, the softest, palest pink he had ever seen her wear. She did not question him—he was grateful for that—in fact did not speak at all, only reached with her bulk, her loving vastness, opened herself to him: a long precious lovemaking, absolute in its kindness: she understood what he needed.

He did not cry, this time, nor did he move from her. All his sores were bleeding, fresh red blood and a cool fluid, and the mixture beaded, ran off her skin. He was weak, too weak to take more than tiny erratic breaths, too weak to keep his eyes open; but before they closed for good, he saw her go a color for which there was no name, and he knew it for her true color, the color of her heart. A sweet and luminous smile, and her embrace grew stronger and stronger, a force terrific but completely painless, like being hugged to death. He felt the precise moment when his heart stopped: it felt like a door, closing with rich finality. Yes, he thought, still smiling, or at least it felt as if he was.

There is such a thing as heaven and hell; she was a long-lived organism. How long, she wasn't sure; she was apologetic, but never mind, he told her, we can find out together. What he did not tell her was that he could *feel* them, still, when they came to her, a grubby parade of them, endless as a soap opera.

He had never enjoyed soap operas, but he had time, now, to change his mind. ●

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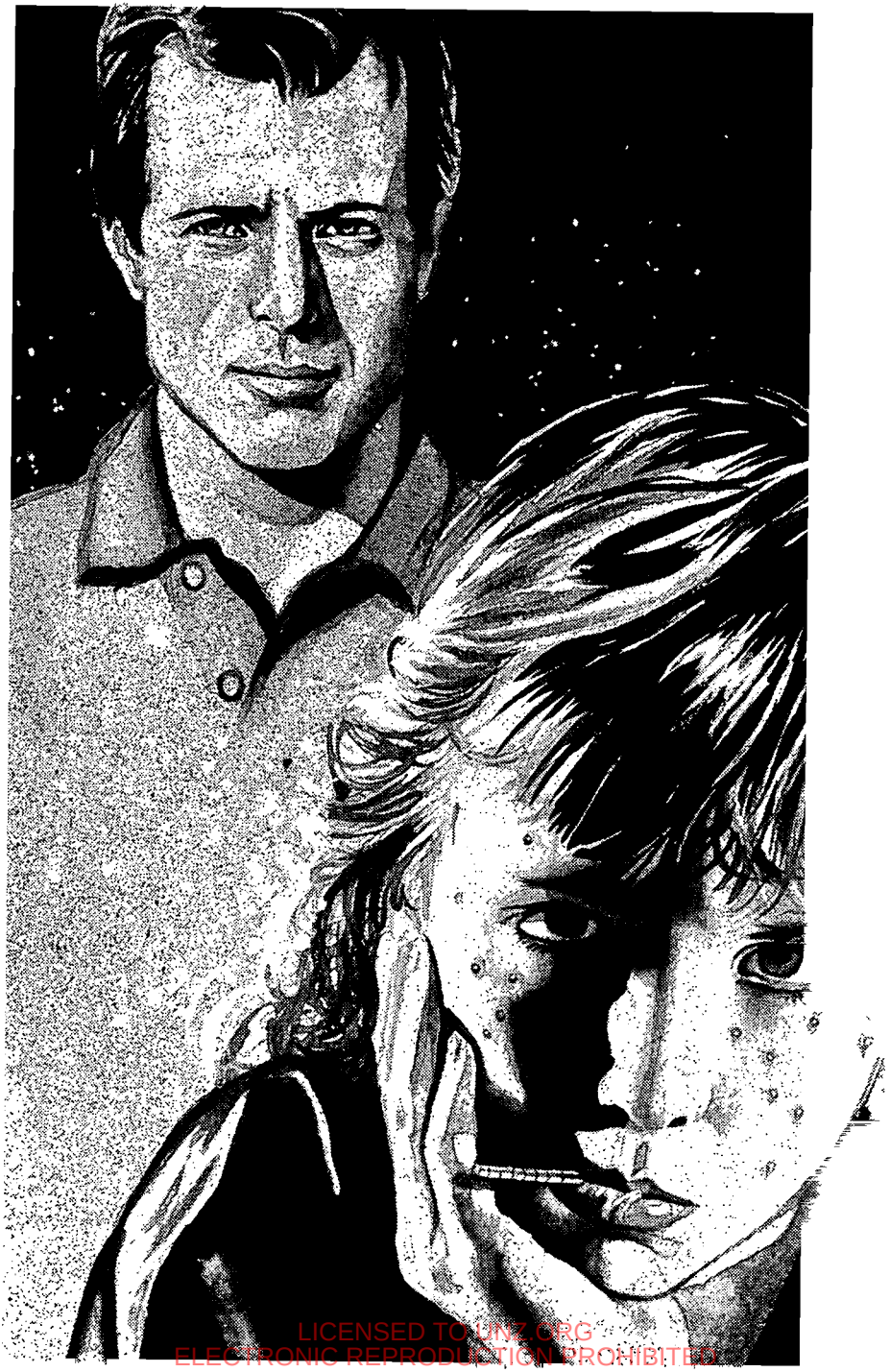

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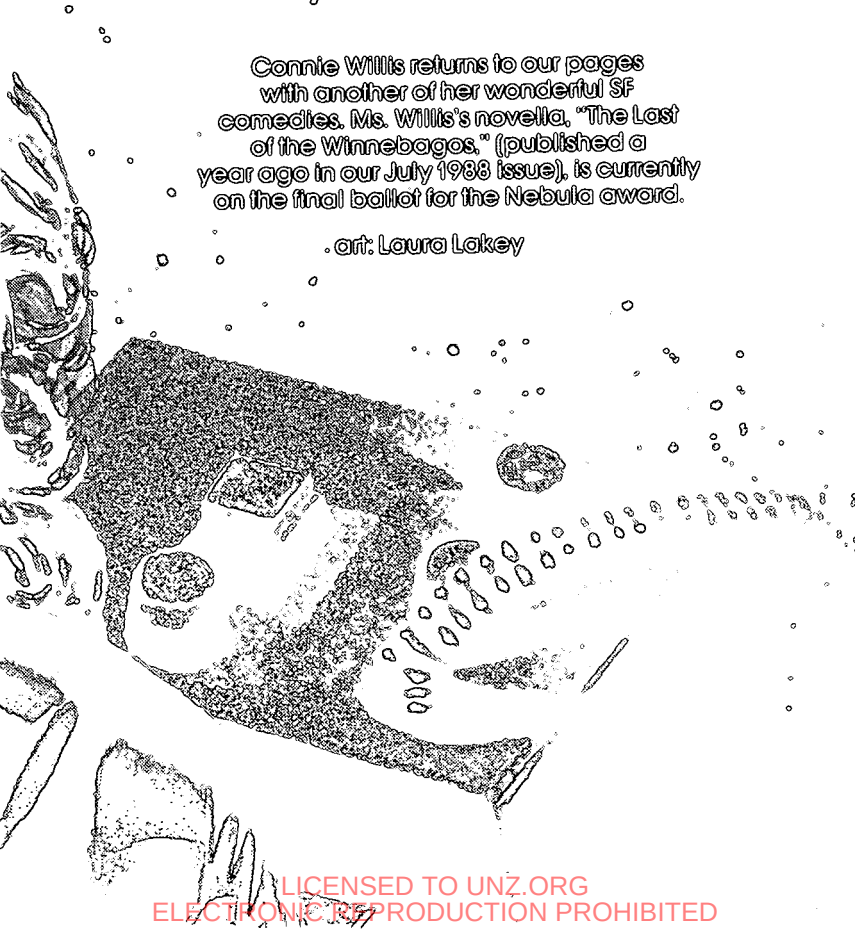
TIME-OUT

by Connie Willis

Connie Willis returns to our pages with another of her wonderful SF comedies. Ms. Willis's novella, "The Last of the Winnebagos," (published a year ago in our July 1988 issue), is currently on the final ballot for the Nebula award.

. art: Laura Lakey



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"I want you to come with me to the airport, Dr. Lejeune," Dr. Young said. "I've got to pick up Andrew Simons."

It was the first time he'd spoken to Dr. Lejeune since she'd told him his project proposal was idiotic, and during the intervening three weeks she'd thought quite a bit about what she would say to him when he did speak to her, but now he sounded so much like the old sensible, sane Max Young that she picked up her purse and said, "Who's Andrew Simons?"

"He's coming in from Tibet," Dr. Young said, leading the way out of the physics building and over to the parking lot. "He's with Duke University. Been studying the cultural aspects of time perception in a lamasery in the Himalayas. He's perfect. I read a monograph of his on déjà vu three months ago and got in touch with Duke." He stopped next to a red Porsche.

"When did you get a Porsche?" Dr. Lejeune said, looking at the license plates. They spelled WITHIT 1, which was a bad sign. So was the Porsche. "And why exactly is this Simons person coming here?"

"He's going to work on the time displacement project," Dr. Young said as if it were obvious, and squeezed himself into the Porsche. "Come on. Get in. His plane gets in at 4:19."

She attempted to get into the Porsche. She had hoped he'd given up on the time displacement project. She had attempted to argue him out of it, with the result that he hadn't spoken to her in three weeks, and she had hoped he had come to his senses, but apparently he hadn't.

The project *was* idiotic. He had decided that time was a quantum object like space and leaped from there to the idea that it could be separated into pieces called hodiechrons, shaken up, and moved around. Quantum time travel. Only he was calling it hodiechron displacement and the silly gadget that was supposed to do all this a temporal oscillator instead of a time machine.

She had decided he was having some kind of midlife crisis, and now the Porsche confirmed it. "I am too old for sports cars," she said, slamming the door shut on the tail of her lab coat. "And so are you."

Dr. Young reached across her to the glove compartment and pulled out a tweed cap and a pair of leather driving gloves.

"Simons is extremely enthusiastic about the project. He accepted the job before I even had a chance to fully explain it to him."

Which, considering what the project involves, is probably a good thing, Dr. Lejeune thought, clutching the dashboard as the Porsche shot out of the parking lot, down College Avenue, and onto the highway.

"How old is he?" she shouted over the roar of the wind.

"Forty-two," Dr. Young shouted back.

"Is he married?"

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"Of course not. He's been in a lamasery in Tibet for five years."

"No wonder he accepted," Dr. Lejeune said. "I should fix him up with Bev Frantz. She's forty. You know her, she's teaching Intro to Nursing this semester. She'd be perfect for him."

"Absolutely not," Dr. Young shouted. "I will not have you endangering this project." He swooped into the airport parking lot. He took off his cap and gloves, shoved them into the glove compartment, and got out. "Are you aware that matchmaking is a substitute for sex? It's one of the classic symptoms of a midlife crisis."

Which is a clear case of the pot psychoanalyzing the kettle, Dr. Lejeune thought, struggling up out of the car. "What do you call buying a Porsche?" she said, following him into the airport. "How about suddenly abandoning your work on subatomic particles and trying to build a time machine? Wouldn't you call those *classic* symptoms?"

"It's a temporal oscillator, not a time machine," Dr. Young said. He walked through the security gate. It buzzed. The guard motioned him back through and held out a plastic bowl for him to empty his pockets into. "The university has complete faith in the project. Dr. Gillis has promised me full university support. And complete freedom in choosing my staff."

"Obviously," Dr. Lejeune said. "If you're hiring Tibetan lamas."

"Dr. Simons is a research psychologist," he said stiffly, putting his keys in the dish and trying again. This time it buzzed before he was even halfway through. Some of the guards from the other security gates came over to watch. "Are you aware that resistance to new ideas is a classic symptom in postmenopausal women?" He took off his belt. "The federal government doesn't share your opinion of my project either. If they did, I'd hardly have gotten my funding, would I?"

"You got your funding?" Dr. Lejeune said, astonished. "The new administration must be as senile as the old one."

He walked through the gate. It buzzed. "It is that kind of negative attitude that has already put this project a month behind schedule!" he said.

"You're sure it isn't displaced hodiechrons?" she said, and swept through the gate. "It's his neck chains," she told the guard. "He's postmenopausal. Classic symptom."

"Mom, when's supper?" Liz asked, opening the refrigerator. "Lisa and I are going to start filling out college applications tonight."

"As soon as your father gets home," Carolyn said. She squeezed past Liz and got the radishes and a tomato out of the crisper drawer. "He had to stay for gymnastics."

"But, Mom, I have to be at volleyball practice at six," Wendy said.

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"I thought the eighth-grade practices were at four," Carolyn said, rummaging through the utensils drawer for a paring knife.

"On Mondays, Tuesdays, and every other Friday," Wendy said. "This is Wednesday, Mom."

The only knife in the entire drawer was a serrated bread knife. Carolyn tried slicing the tomato with it. It wouldn't even cut through the skin.

"How come Dad's having gymnastics practice?" Liz asked. "I thought the season didn't start till next week."

"It doesn't," Carolyn said. "Shut the refrigerator. He's interviewing assistant coaches."

"I have to have new hightops," Wendy said.

"You had new hightops when school started."

"These are for volleyball. Coach Nicotero says we need ones with bank and turn heels and spike insteps."

The phone rang. Liz dived for it. "It's for you," she said disgustedly, and handed Carolyn the phone.

"Hi, this is Sherri at the elementary school," the voice on the phone said. "I tried to catch you when you were doing your volunteer stuff, but you would not believe what our beloved principal Old Paperwork decided his secretary should do now! He's having me call every parent and check to make sure the information is correct. Just in case, he says. Are you aware that you are the 'person to be contacted if parents cannot be reached' on fourteen separate emergency cards?"

"Yes," Carolyn said. "It's because I'm at home during the day. I may well be the last woman in America at home during the day."

"No, Heidi Dreismeier's mother doesn't work either. Anyway, Old Paperwork decided I should call every single 'person to be contacted if parents cannot be reached' just to make sure they really can be contacted and their phones are in working order. The man's a menace."

"Mom, it's *five o'clock*," Wendy said.

"Anyway," Sherri said, "I need to read you the names of all these kids. Heidi Dreismeier, Monica Morales, Ricky Morales—"

"Mom, I'm not going to have time to eat," Wendy said.

"Troy Yoder," Sherri said, "Brendan James. Speaking of which, did you know Brendan's parents are getting a divorce?"

"You're kidding," Carolyn said. "She's PTA vice-president."

"Not any more she's not. You remember that Make Me Marvy guy who was going around doing color consultations? Well, apparently Brendan's mother didn't stop with a few swatches."

"Mother, Coach Nicotero said we're supposed to let our food settle before we practice."

"Look, Sherri, I'm going to have to go," Carolyn said. "Whoever put my name on the emergency card, it's fine."

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"Wait, wait, that isn't really what I called about. Do you remember that fat, bald guy from the university who had you take all those tests last March?"

"Dr. Young?"

"Yeah. Well, he's coming back with some kind of research team, and he wants you to work for him. It'd be every day all day for about a month, he said. It pays better than volunteering."

"Oh, gosh, I don't know," Carolyn said, thinking about Wendy's high-tops. "Don starts gymnastics practice next week and the PTA Fair's coming up. Did he say how much he'd pay?"

"Yeah, and he must really want you because he said he'd pay anything you asked. And you wouldn't have to start till October second."

Carolyn tried to lift up the September page of the calendar with the hand that was still holding the bread knife. "That's next Wednesday, right?"

"I have my orthodontist appointment on Wednesday," Wendy said.

"I'll have to see if I can reschedule some stuff. How long will you be at school?"

"Oh, till about midnight if old Paperwork has his way. After I'm done with the emergency cards, he wants the recess duty schedule redone alphabetically."

"I'll call you back," Carolyn said, and hung up.

"There's no way that meat loaf is going to be done by six," Wendy said.

Carolyn poked some holes in a hot dog with the end of the bread knife. Then she called the orthodontist and changed Wendy's appointment to four-fifteen on Tuesday.

"I have practice at four on Tuesdays," Wendy said. "Coach Nicotero says if we miss even one practice we can't play."

"What do you have on Thursday?" Carolyn asked the orthodontist's receptionist.

"We have a five forty-five," she said.

"How's five forty-five?" Carolyn asked Wendy.

"Fine," Wendy said.

"Thursday's the College Fair," Liz said. "You promised you'd drive Lisa and me."

"I have a three-thirty on Wednesday," the receptionist said.

"Oh, good. That's after school. I'll take it," Carolyn said.

Before she could get the phone back in its cradle, it rang again.

"Hi, this is Lisa. Can I talk to Liz?"

Carolyn handed the phone to Liz and got Wendy's hot dog out of the microwave. She poured her a glass of milk.

"Coach Nicotero says we're supposed to have something from each of the four food groups. Meat, grains, dairy products—"

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"Fruits and vegetables," Carolyn said. She handed Wendy the tomato.

Liz hung up the phone. "I'm eating supper at Lisa's," she said. "Can you drop me off when you take Wendy?" She ran into her room and came out with a stack of college catalogs. "Where did you say you went to college, Mom?"

"NSC," Carolyn said.

"Did you like it?"

I had all the time in the world, Carolyn thought. I didn't have to take anybody anywhere, and I'd never heard of the four basic food groups. My favorite food was a suicide, which my roommate Allison and I made by mixing different flavors of pop together.

"I loved it," Carolyn said.

The phone rang.

"Sorry to call so late, honey," Don said. "We're not even half done. Don't wait supper for me. You and the girls go ahead and eat."

The plane taxied to a stop, and everyone made a dash for the aisles. Andrew was in the window seat. He pulled his duffel bag out from under the seat in front of him and leaned back against the upright seat back. He shouldn't have had the Scotch on the L.A.-to-Denver leg. He had hoped it might put him to sleep so he wouldn't have to listen to the obviously unhappily married couple in the seats next to him.

Instead it had sent him off into a sentimental reverie of his junior year in college, which was possibly the worst year of his life. He had nearly flunked out of pre-law, he had gotten serious about Stephanie Forrester, and he had been an usher at her wedding. There was no reason to remember that misbegotten year at all, and especially not nostalgically.

"I didn't say I didn't want you to play tennis," the male half of the unhappy couple said. He stood up, opened the overhead compartment, and got down a suitcase and his raincoat. "I just said I thought four lessons a day was a little too much."

"For your information," the woman said, "Carlos thinks I have real potential." She reached in the elasticized seatback pocket, pulled out a paperback of *Passages,* and jammed it in her purse.

Andrew remembered Dr. Young's project proposal and got it out of his seat pocket. That was the real reason he'd had the Scotch, to try to blot out the memory of Dr. Young's harebrained ideas. Dr. Young's theory was that time existed not as a continuous flow but as a series of discrete quantum objects. They were perceived as a flow because of a "persistence" phenomenon that was learned in childhood. That part of the theory wasn't so bad. Ashtekar's research at Syracuse University had already suggested the quantum nature of time, and the idea of perceptual time blocks of some duration was generally accepted by temporal psychologists. With-

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out it, there couldn't be phenomena like music, which depended on relationships between notes. If time were a continuous flow, music would be perceived as a single note replaced immediately in the consciousness by another instead of as a pattern of interval and duration.

But the concept of time blocks, or hodiechrons, as Dr. Young had christened them, was a perceptual concept, not a physical reality. Not only did Dr. Young think his hodiechrons were real, he also thought they were much longer than any temporal psychologist had suggested—minutes or even hours long instead of the seconds it took to hear a melody. But the truly crazy part of his theory was that these hodiechrons could be moved around like toy blocks, even stacked one on top of the other.

It had nothing to do with cultural aspects of time perception or déjà vu, and if he'd read it all the way through before this, he'd never have accepted Dr. Young's offer, but he hadn't checked Dr. Young out at all. Dr. Young had checked him out—he'd had him take a whole battery of tests before he offered Andrew the job. And Andrew had leaped at it without even reading the proposal. Andrew stood up in a semi-crouch and looked ahead at the line of people in the aisle. He willed it to move.

"For your information," the woman said, "Carlos says I have the most beautiful backhand stance he's ever seen."

"'For *your* information," the man said, wrestling with something in the overhead compartment, "Carlos is paid to say things like that to overweight, middle-aged women."

Andrew took his plastic safety instructions card out of the seat pocket and began reading the emergency exit diagrams.

"I've been thinking about going on tour," the woman said.

"Now that's what I mean," the man said, pulling down a tennis racket in a zippered lavender cover. "You're getting carried away with this tennis thing!"

"The way you got carried away with those Managua municipal bonds? The way you got carried away with that little blonde in securities?" She grabbed the tennis racket out of his hands.

According to the safety card there were emergency slides over both wings. If he could climb back over the seats till he got to row H and then pull down the handle on the emergency door . . .

"I thought we agreed not to talk about Vanessa," the man said.

"I am not talking about Vanessa. I am talking about Heather."

Andrew sat back down in his seat, fastened his seat belt, and pretended to read the proposal until everybody but the flight attendants had gotten off the plane. The proposal didn't make any more sense now than when he had read it in earnest.

He looked longingly at the emergency slide handle and then stuck the proposal in his duffel bag and walked out through the covered walkway

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and into the terminal. Dr. Young and a fiftyish woman with disorganized hair were the only people left at the gate. The woman was looking interestedly down the hall.

"Dr. Simons," Dr. Young said, coming forward to shake his hand. "I want you to meet Dr. Lejeune. Dr. Lejeune, Dr. Simons is going to run the psychology end of our little project. Dr. Lejeune?"

Dr. Lejeune came over and shook his hand, still trying to peer down the corridor. "This woman just hit some man over the head with a tennis racket," she said.

"She found out about Heather," Andrew said.

"We're very excited to have you working with us," Dr. Young said. "I'll be working with the oscillator, and Dr. Lejeune will be running the computer interp."

"Since when?" Dr. Lejeune said.

Andrew began looking for emergency exits. There didn't appear to be any.

"Dr. Gillis told me I could choose whatever staff I needed. I told him I wanted you as my second in command."

Dr. Lejeune was glancing around as if she were looking for a tennis racket to hit Dr. Young over the head with. "Did you also tell him I think your project is completely addlepated?"

I should have had at least two more Scotches, Andrew thought. Or what were those things he had drunk when he ushered in Stephanie Forrester's wedding? Clockstoppers. He should have had a clockstopper.

"Addlepated?" Dr. Young said. "Addlepated! Dr. Simons here doesn't think it's addlepated. He came all the way from Tibet to work on this project. Tell us, Dr. Simons, is 'addlepated' the word that springs to mind about this project?"

The word that sprang to mind was disaster. He should have had a lot of clockstoppers. Ten. Or fifteen.

"No," he said.

"You see?" Dr. Young said triumphantly to Dr. Lejeune. He took Andrew's bag. "We'll go straight back to the lab and I'll show you the oscillator. And then I'll outline my theory in more detail."

His junior year hadn't been half bad, all things considered, Andrew thought, walking out to the car with them. He had had to usher at Stephanie Forrester's wedding and when the minister had read that part about, "let him speak now or forever hold his peace," the entire congregation had turned and looked at him, but otherwise it hadn't been half bad.

Dr. Lejeune didn't speak to Dr. Young on the way home from the airport even though he didn't realize until they got to the Porsche that

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there wasn't room for all three of them and then told her to take Andrew's duffel bag and go find a taxi. Andrew, who was looking either jet-lagged or sorry he had ever left Tibet, insisted on being the one to take the taxi, and Dr. Young spent the trip back to the university telling her how her attitude was undermining the project. She maintained a stony silence.

She maintained it through his announcing that their research was not going to be done at the university but at an elementary school in a town called Henley that was halfway across the state and through his unveiling of the temporal oscillator, even though it was close on that one. It looked like a giant lava lamp.

She talked to Dr. Gillis instead, but she didn't get anywhere. Dr. Gillis refused to take her refusal to work on the project seriously. Worse, he thought shiftable hodiechrons and temporal oscillation were entirely plausible, and when she told him she thought Max was having some kind of midlife crisis, Dr. Gillis stiffened and said, "Dr. Young is three years younger than I am. I would hardly call him middle-aged. Besides, he is far too intelligent and sensible a man to have a midlife crisis."

"That's what I thought," Dr. Lejeune said, "till I saw the Porsche."

She went back to the lab and Andrew Simons, who was staring at the temporal oscillator. He looked terrible. Max hadn't given him a minute's rest since he got there, but she had the feeling it was more than that. He looked unhappy. He needs to get married, she thought. I really should introduce him to Bev Frantz. She's pretty and smart and unmarried. She'd be perfect.

"How can this be a temporal oscillator?" Andrew said. "It looks like a lava lamp."

Dr. Young came in, beaming. "I've just been talking to the school secretary in Henley." The top of his head was bright pink with excitement. "I decided you needed an assistant, Dr. Simons, and they just called to say they'd hired someone. Her name's Carolyn Hendricks. She's perfect. She'll be helping you with the screening and getting coffee and things like that."

"Why does she need to be perfect if all she's doing is getting the coffee?" Dr. Lejeune almost asked and then remembered she wasn't speaking to him.

"She's forty years old, married, secretary of the PTA, and has two daughters. Her husband coaches the girls' gymnastics team. The season's just started," he added, as if that were perfect, too. "Which reminds me—" he said and hurried out.

Why is her husband's coaching a bunch of teenaged girls in leotards perfect? she thought. Does he expect her to fly off the uneven bars and into the past?

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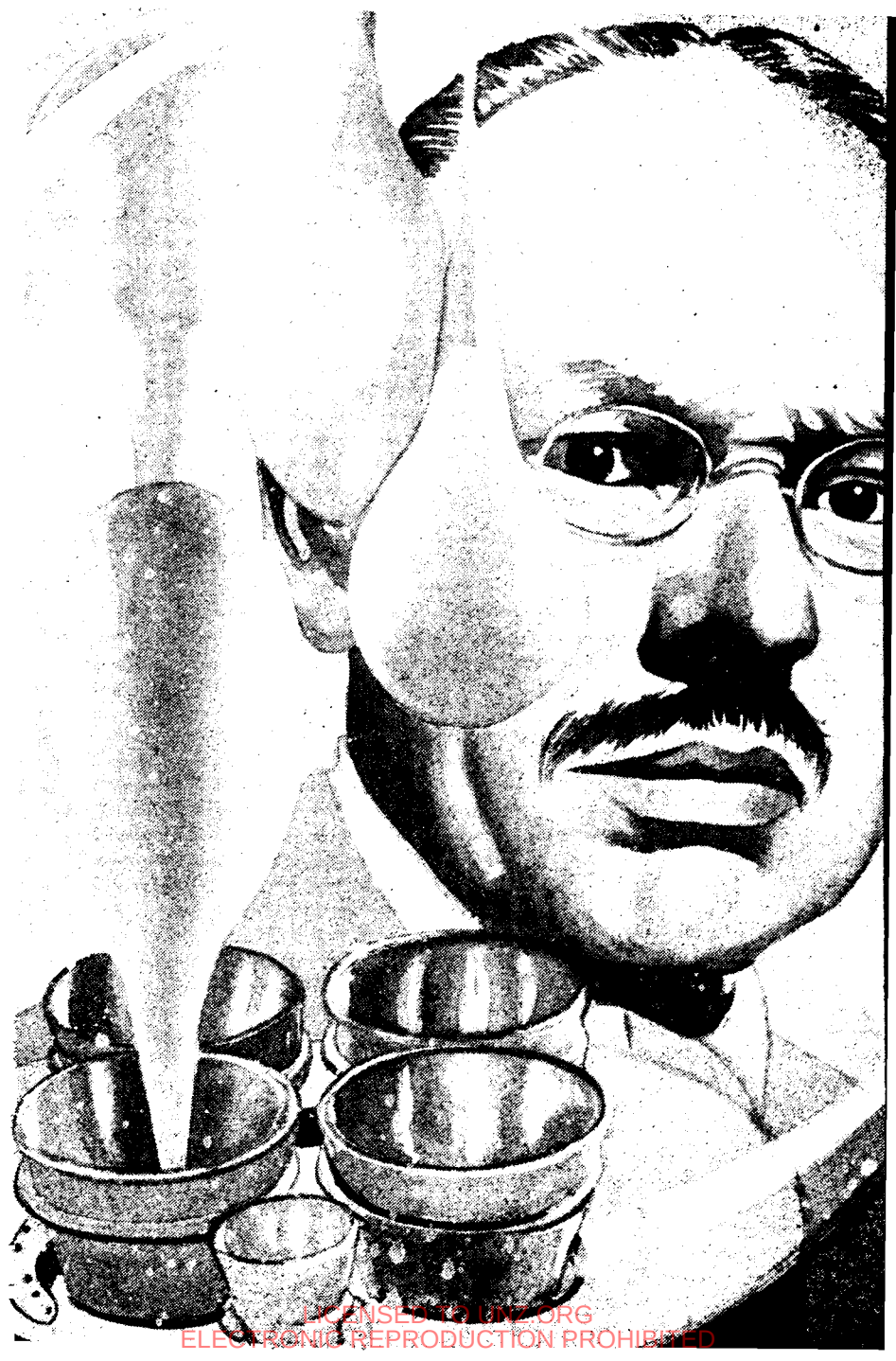

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"Have you ever heard of a drink called a clockstopper?" Andrew asked, still staring at the lava lamp. "I used to drink them in college."

"No," Dr. Lejeune said, frowning at the door Dr. Young had just left by.

"Beer and wine," Andrew said. "That's what they were made out of. The clockstoppers."

"Oh," said Dr. Lejeune, still frowning. "We called them cataclysms."

Carolyn dropped Wendy at the middle school and drove over to the elementary.

"Where am I supposed to go?" she asked Sherri in the office. "The library?"

"No," Sherri said, handing Carolyn a sheaf of papers. "You're downstairs in the music room."

"Where's music?"

"In with the PE classes. They divided the gym in half with masking tape."

"And the music teacher stood for that?"

"She had to. Old Paperwork told her how much money Dr. Young was paying to use the school for his project."

"If he's paying so much, why didn't he let him use the library?"

"I don't know. The music room *is* pretty cramped."

"I know," Carolyn said. "I did hearing tests in there last year. The room's L-shaped, and the light switch is at the top of this hall part next to the door and about a million miles from the main part of the room. The third graders were always switching it off on their way to recess and leaving me in the dark, because there aren't any windows. Can't you see if we can be in the library instead?"

"I'll ask Old Paperwork," Sherri said. "I don't know what you're griping about, though. I'd love being stuck in a small space with a gorgeous-looking man like that."

"Dr. *Young?*"

"No. The guy you're working with." She fumbled through the papers on the counter. "Andrew Something." She picked up a pink sheet and looked at it. "Andrew Simons. Speaking of gorgeous-looking, how's that adorable husband of yours?"

"Adorable," Carolyn said, smiling. "When I get to see him. Gymnastics is our worst time of the year. We hardly ever get to see each other. And this year's been even worse because of his having to hire a new assistant coach."

"I heard they hired some twenty-year-old who looks like Farrah Fawcett."

"They did," Carolyn said, looking through her collection of forms. "Don

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was really upset. He spent two whole weeks doing interviews and then the board hires this Linda person, who never even applied."

"I'll bet he's not all that upset," Sherri said. "He gets to work with Farrah Fawcett, you get to work with this absolute hunk of a psychologist, why don't I ever get to work with anybody gorgeous?" Sherri asked. "Do you know what happened to me when I had the Make Me Marvy guy at my house? He wrapped a dishtowel around my head, held up a few swatches, and told me I look sallow in pink. It isn't fair. The married women are grabbing up all the eligible bachelors. Like Shannon Williams's mother."

"Shannon Williams's mother?" Carolyn said, looking up from her papers. "I thought it was Brendan's mother who ran off with the colors guy."

"It was. Shannon's mother is messing around with some guy she works with at the bank. It seems they had to spend all this time in the vault together, and the next thing you know. . . . Speaking of which, how much time will Don have to spend with this Linda person?"

"I think I'd better get down to the music room before the bell rings," Carolyn said. "Is this Dr. Simons down there?"

"I don't know. He's been in and out all morning, carrying stuff. I'll check with Old Paperwork about the library. And in the meantime, you watch out for this Andrew Simons guy. That music room is even smaller than the vault." She held the pink paper up to her neck. "Do you really think pink makes me look sallow?"

"Yes," Carolyn said.

Andrew hooked the temporal oscillator up to the response monitors and plugged the whole thing into the only outlet he could find in the music room. The lights stayed on.

Good, he thought, and started hooking up the rest of the response wires which were supposed to register reactions in the students they tested.

According to Dr. Young they would be screening to find children who saw time as blocks rather than a continuous flow. These children would have longer hodiechrons since, according to Dr. Young, their hodiechrons got progressively shorter as they learned to perceive time as a flow.

After Andrew had found these children, they would be hooked up to the temporal oscillator and worked into an excited emotional state and they would begin switching their hodiechrons around. Dr. Young claimed he had been able to make it happen on a subatomic level.

"Maximum agitation," Dr. Young had said. "Simple bombardment won't do it. The key is maximum agitation."

"But even if it does happen at the microcosmic level, what makes you

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think you can make it happen in macro?" Dr. Lejeune had asked, the first thing she'd said to Dr. Young in a week and a half.

"It already happens," Dr. Young had said. "You've both experienced it. The sensation of déjà vu. The now is displaced for a milli-second by a hodiechron from the past, and you have the sensation of having seen or heard something before. It usually occurs when you're in an excited emotional state. Déjà vu is temporal displacement, and what we're going to do in this project is to produce it in longer hodiechrons so the displacement lasts a second, a minute, as long as several hours."

Andrew didn't believe a word of it. He had told Dr. Lejeune so while they packed the equipment for the trip to the elementary school in Henley.

"I don't believe it either," she'd said.

"Then why are you staying?"

She'd shrugged. "Somebody needs to be around to save him from himself, or at least pick up the pieces when his precious oscillator doesn't work. But that's no reason for you to stay. So why are you?"

I don't know, he'd thought. Why did I agree to usher at Stephanie Forrester's wedding? "Maybe I'm having a mid-life crisis," he said.

"Along with everybody else around here," Dr. Lejeune had said and then looked thoughtful. "You're forty-two, right?" she'd said. "Hmm. Did you have a girlfriend in Tibet?"

"I was in a lamasery in the Himalayas."

"Humm," she'd said and handed him another piece of equipment.

There was too much equipment. He didn't even know what some of it was. There was a medium-size gray box with only an on-off switch on it and two smaller ones without even that, and no jacks to plug any of them into anything else. He wondered if they were something the music teacher had left behind. He set them on the piano along with the photon counter and the spectroscope.

The lights went off. "Hey!" he said. The lights went back on.

"Sorry," a woman's voice said. She came down the ell and into the room. She had short dark hair and was wearing a skirt and blazer. She extended her hand. "I'm Carolyn Hendricks. I couldn't tell if you were in here or not, and I didn't want to get locked in. Sherri forgot to give me a key. I called a couple of times, but the room's soundproofed unless you really yell."

He shook her hand. "Which you knew I'd do if you turned off the lights?"

"Yes," she said. "I had to do hearing tests in here last year, and the third graders think it's funny to flip the light switch on their way out to recess." She smiled. "I yelled a lot." She had a nice smile.

"For a minute there I thought maybe I'd blown the lights," he said,

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indicating the jumble of wires. "Would you believe there's only one outlet in the whole room?"

"Yes," she said. She watched him plug the spectrum analyzer into the power supply. "Maybe it would be a good idea if I brought in a flashlight tomorrow, just in case we blow a fuse."

"Or a miner's lamp," he said, peering at the back of the spectrum analyzer. "It got awfully black in here when you turned off the light."

" 'Black as the pit from pole to pole,' " she said.

He looked up at her.

"I know you," he said.

"Oh?" she said, squinting at him the way people did when they were trying to decide if someone looked familiar or not.

"Were you ever at Duke University?"

"No," she said warily.

"And I don't suppose you've been in Tibet lately."

"No," she said even more warily, and he realized suddenly how that must sound, especially down here in the black hole of Calcutta.

"Sorry," he said. "That wasn't meant to sound like the oldest line in the book. You must remind me of somebody," he said, frowning.

That was a lie. She didn't remind him of anybody. He was positive he'd never seen her before, but for a fraction of a second there, when she said, "Black as the pit from pole to pole," he could have sworn he knew her.

She was still looking wary. "What I need you to do is help me get this equipment arranged so we can actually move in here. If we could move *that,*" he pointed to the resonant converter, "over next to the blackboard and then do something with the chairs to get them out of the way—"

"Sure," she said, squeezing between the oscilloscope and the magnetometer to get to him. Together they hefted the resonant converter, carried it over to the blackboard, and set it down. "We can move some of these chairs out of the room if you don't need them," she said. "We can store them in the supply closet."

"Great," he said.

"I'll go get the key from the janitor," she said. She started to pick up one of the chairs and knocked it over instead.

"I—" he said and clamped it off.

She picked up the chair and looked inquiringly at him.

"Leave a couple for us," he said lamely. "And one for the child we'll be testing. And maybe you'd better leave a couple for Dr. Young and Dr. Lejeune in case they want to observe. Five. Leave five chairs."

"Okay," she said and went down the hall.

"I know you," he said, looking after her. "I *know* you."

* * *

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Dr. Lejeune spent half the day setting up her computer equipment and the other half looking for Dr. Young.

"Have you been down in that broom closet of a music room?" she asked when he finally came in. "My purse is bigger. I was down there this morning, and there was hardly room for the two of them to even move, let alone try to get kids in there."

"Perfect," Dr. Young said.

"Perfect?" Dr. Lejeune said suspiciously. He had said Carolyn Hendricks was perfect. Come to think of it, he had called Andrew that, too. "He's perfect," he had said. "He's forty-two years old and spent the last five years in a Tibetan lamasery."

"Why is it perfect?" Dr. Lejeune said.

"Your computer setup," Dr. Young said. "I knew the kindergarten was the perfect place for you to work."

"Well, the music room isn't."

"No, I know," he said, shaking his bald head sadly. "I tried to get the library, but Mr. Paprocki said they needed it for Fire Prevention Week. Maybe after that's over we can move them," he said and left before she could ask him anything else.

She went up to the office. "Is Mr. Paprocki in?" she asked Sherri, who was folding a stack of orange papers in half one at a time.

"He's out on the playground. Brendan James got into a fight. It's his third fight today. His mother ran off with the Make Me Marvy man."

Dr. Lejeune took one of the folded sheets and unfolded it. It said, "ATTN PARENTS: IT'S CHICKEN POX TIME!" Dr. Lejeune folded it back up. "Make Me Marvy?" she said.

"Yeah, you know, he tells you what colors you can wear by examining your skin tones. And then he runs off with you, at least if you're Brendan James's mother. All he did to me was tell me to wear fuchsia."

Dr. Lejeune took part of the stack of orange sheets and started folding them.

"Actually, I wasn't all that surprised it happened. There was this article in *Woman's Day* about the Donkey Doldrums. You know, that point in a marriage where you feel like all you are is a pack animal and just the week before she'd been in to bring Brendan his lunch that he forgot, and she told me the only time her husband noticed her anymore was when he needed her to find his keys. It still makes me mad, though. I mean, the Make Me Marvy man was just about the only single guy in town."

"Is Mr. Paprocki married?" Dr. Lejeune asked, folding.

"Old Paperwork?" Sherri asked, surprised. She folded the last sheet in her pile and got a stamp and stamp pad out of the desk drawer. "Married? Are you kidding? He never looks up from his triplicate forms

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long enough to see you're a woman, let alone marry you!" She pounded the stamp into the stamp pad two or three times and banged it onto the folded sheet. It was a smiley face. She whacked the next sheet. "What about Dr. Simons? I suppose he's too good-looking not to be married."

"No," Dr. Lejeune said, thinking of something else. "He spent the last five years in a lamasery in Tibet."

"You're kidding!" Sherri said. "That's perfect!"

Dr. Lejeune narrowed her eyes. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, because he's probably desperate. Five years and no sex would make me desperate," she said, stamping. "What am I talking about? Five years and no sex *have* made me desperate. But I'll bet the first woman who comes along can have him for the taking."

"I'll try to catch Mr. Paprocki later," Dr. Lejeune said, handing the stack of folded sheets to Sherri. "Just tell him I wanted to talk to him about the music room."

"What about it?"

"It's too small. They've got all that equipment in there, and they can hardly move. I was just wondering if there was some other room they could use."

"Carolyn Hendricks asked about that this morning, and I asked Old—Mr. Paprocki about it. He said he knew it was too small and he'd offered Dr. Young the library instead, but Dr. Young had insisted on the music room. He said it was perfect for what he was going to do."

While Carolyn was waiting for Wendy at the orthodontist, she unstapled the orange flyer Sherri had handed her on her way out and read it.

"ATTN PARENTS: IT'S CHICKEN POX TIME!" it said in all caps. There were three subheadings, Be Aware, Be Prepared, and Be Informed, each with a cute picture of a bee next to it. "Be Aware. Sixteen cases have been reported in the state since school started, two in Henley, though so far we have had no cases in the schools."

The Be Prepared section listed the symptoms of the disease, and the Be Informed section talked about the incubation period, which was from thirteen to seventeen days, and concluded, "Chicken pox is most contagious the day before any symptoms appear and during the first few days of breaking out."

Great, Carolyn thought. Neither Liz nor Wendy had had the chicken pox even though they'd both been exposed when they were little.

After Wendy was done Carolyn ran to the cleaners and the bank and went to the grocery store.

"Don't forget we're out of pop," Wendy said. "And Coach Nicotero said we were supposed to have—"

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"The four basic food groups," Carolyn said. "Are you aware that pop is not a basic food group?"

"Are we going to the mall to get my hightops after this?" Wendy asked. "My shoelaces came untied during practice today and I called a time-out and Sarah Perkins said there weren't any time-outs in volleyball and I said there were time-outs in every game. So are we?"

"Are we what?" Carolyn said, staring at the two-liter bottles of pop. When she was in college pop had come in reasonable sized bottles. They had bought one bottle each of Coke and orange and lemon-lime and what else? Root beer? Cream soda?

"Getting my hightops. At the mall."

Carolyn looked at her watch. "It's a quarter to five already, and Dad said he'd be home early tonight. We'll have to do it tonight after supper."

"Mother," Wendy said, somehow managing to get several extra syllables in *mother,* "It's Wednesday. I have practice at six."

Carolyn bought two-liter bottles of cola, orange, cream soda, root beer, and lemon-lime and some new batteries for the flashlight and raced Wendy out to the mall to get her hightops. They didn't get home till five-thirty.

"I'm eating supper over at Lisa's," Liz said. "We're going to do our applications on her computer."

"I have to be at practice at six," Wendy said, lacing up her hightops.

Carolyn made Wendy a peanut butter sandwich and began unpacking the groceries. "Did your father call, Liz?"

"No. Sherri did, though. She wants you to call her at school. What kind of microcomputers did your college have?"

"None." Carolyn took out the bottles of pop and set them on the counter. "There weren't any microcomputers in those days."

"You're kidding! What did you have then?"

"It's twenty to six," Wendy said, munching on her sandwich.

Carolyn handed Wendy an apple and called Sherri.

"I talked to Monica and Ricky Morales's mother after school, and she says she's not surprised Brendan James's mother ran off with that Make Me Marvy man. She read this article in *Cosmopolitan* on the seven warning signs of Over-Forty-Frenzy, and she had them all. She was forty-three, her husband was never home, her kids were right at two of the most demanding ages—"

"What? Thirteen and seventeen?" Carolyn asked.

"No. Two and five. The article said she was easy prey for the first man who said two nice words to her."

"Mom, it's a quarter to six," Wendy said.

"I know the feeling," Carolyn said.

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"And I know you," Sherri said. "You'd never run off with anybody. You're crazy about Don and your girls are two of the nicest girls I know."

"*Mom,*" Wendy said, pointing at the kitchen clock.

"I'm in kind of a hurry," Carolyn said. "Can I call you back?"

"You don't have to do that. I just wanted to warn you that Heidi Dreismeier's mother called. She heard you were doing tests and wanted to know how Heidi should study for them. I told her not to worry, but you know how she is. She'll probably call you next. I'll talk to you tomorrow," she said and hung up.

Carolyn pulled her coat on and fished her car keys out of her purse. The phone rang. She handed Liz the keys and picked up the receiver.

"Hi, sweetheart," Don said. "How was your first day of work?"

"Fine," she said, waving goodbye to the girls. "We moved equipment all day. And chairs. I'm still not sure what this project is all about. There's one machine that looks like a giant lava lamp. And the guy I work with—" She stopped.

"The guy you work with what?"

"Nothing. Did you know Brendan James's mother ran off with the Make Me Marvy man? And there have been two cases of chicken pox in Henley."

"Great," Don said. "The girls will probably both get it. You've had it, haven't you?"

"What? Chicken pox?" Carolyn said. "Of course I—" She stopped. "I don't remember." She frowned. "I must have. I had to have had it as a kid. I mean, all those times the girls were exposed when they were little, I was exposed, too, and I never got it, but . . . isn't that funny? I don't remember having it."

"It'll come to you if you don't think about it," Don said. "You're probably just tired."

"I am," she said. "Wendy had her orthodontist appointment and then dragged me all over the mall looking for volleyball shoes, and then Sherri called and Wendy had to go to practice."

"*And* you moved equipment all day. No wonder you're exhausted. Linda says she doesn't know how you do it all, taking care of the kids and all and now this job. She said she wondered if you had any time left over for being a wife."

"And what did you tell her?"

"I said you were a terrific wife and I—" Don said something to somebody else and then came back on the line. "Sorry. Linda just came in. She went out to get us some sandwiches. That's what I called about. I thought I was going to make it home early, but Linda is feeling real insecure about the meet tomorrow. She wanted to go over the floor ex routines

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again. But, listen, sweetheart, I can tell the girls to come in before school tomorrow."

"No, that's okay," Carolyn said. "I'm just being tired and cranky." She had a sudden thought. "I'll make myself a suicide," she said.

"A what?" Don said.

"A suicide," she said. "We used to drink them in college when we'd had a bad day."

She told Don goodbye, hung up, and opened all the bottles of pop.

We used to drink them in college, she thought, pouring some Coke in the glass. She added some orange and a little root beer. My roommate Allison and I used to sit on the floor and drink them and talk about what we were going to do with our lives. I do not remember our ever discussing driving people to the orthodontist or volleyball practice or the mall. She added a dollop of grape, filled the glass up with the lemon lime, and stirred it with the knife she had used for the peanut butter.

I don't remember us ever discussing being married to a coach with a snotty assistant.

She took the suicide into the living room, sat down on the floor and took a sip. It didn't taste anything like the suicides she and Allison had made, probably because Allison was the one who always made them. That one fall quarter when Allison was in Europe she had had to experiment for days before she got the recipe right. That had been a bad fall quarter. It had snowed all the time, and she had sat by the window and drunk suicides and thought about falling in love, and being pursued by handsome men, and sex.

Which reminded her. She set the suicide on the coffee table and went and got the flashlight and put the batteries in.

Andrew got to school early, hoping he'd have a few minutes to try to figure out why he kept thinking he knew Carolyn Hendricks, but she was already there.

"I brought the flashlight," she said. "Where shall we put it so we both know where it is in case of emergency?"

"How about the top of the piano?" he said.

She set it on end between the two gray boxes that didn't plug into anything. She didn't look at all familiar today, which Andrew was grateful for. It was bad enough working on a nutty project without behaving like a nut yourself.

"We're just going to be doing screening today," he said. "The Idelman-Ponoffo Short Term Memory Inventory. It consists of reading strings of numbers, letters, and words and having the child repeat them back to you, forward, backward, from the middle—"

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"I know," Carolyn said. "Dr. Young gave it to me when he tested me last year."

"Oh," Andrew said. He had had the idea Dr. Young didn't know her, that she had been picked at random by the elementary school. "Good. You'll be asking the questions, and I'll be monitoring their responses. They'll be hooked up to an EKG and autonomic response sensors, and I'll be videotaping the testing."

"Don't you think all this equipment is liable to scare five-year-olds?"

"That's what you're here for. They know you already, and you'll be the one interacting with them. Don't start the test immediately. Talk to them a while, and then we'll hook them up as unobtrusively as possible and start the test."

She went and got the first kindergartener and brought him in. "This is Matt Rothaus," she said.

"Wow, neat!" Matt said, racing over to look at the temporal oscillator. " 'Star Trek: The Next Generation'!"

Carolyn laughed. She leaned forward. "Do you like 'Star Trek'?"

I know you, Andrew thought. I've never seen you before, but I've heard you laugh and lean forward just like that.

"What did you do in Show and Tell today?" Carolyn was asking Matt.

"Heidi threw up," Matt said. "It was gross to the max."

At lunch Dr. Lejeune set her tray down next to Sherri's. "How's Heidi?" she asked. "It isn't the chicken pox, is it?"

"No. Nervous stomach. Her mother—"

"Don't tell me. She ran off with the man who installed their cable TV."

"You're kidding!" Sherri said. "Where did you hear that?"

"I was kidding. What about her mother?"

"Oh, she just lessons Heidi to death. Ballet, tap, swimming, tae kwon do. The poor kid probably wishes her mother would run off with somebody and leave her alone." She sighed. "I wish somebody would run off with me."

"What about Mr. Paprocki?" Dr. Lejeune said.

"Old Paperwork? Are you kidding? He's never even looked at me." She took a bite of macaroni, hamburger, and tomato sauce. "I think my timing must be off or something. I always meet guys after they're already married or engaged. Would you believe I was out with strep throat when Dr. Young did all that testing last March or I could have been the one down there in that cozy little music room with Dr. Simons?"

"All what testing?" Dr. Lejeune said.

"The testing he did to find somebody to work with Dr. Simons," Sherri said, eating her peach slices. "He did all kinds of interviews and stuff and then gave the finalists all these psychological tests. If I'd known how

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gorgeous Dr. Simons was, I'd have taken a few tests myself, but I thought whoever Dr. Young picked was going to work with *him!*"

Dr. Young had gone up to Fermilab in February and been gone two months. She had assumed—correction, he had let her assume—he was working with the cyclotron that whole time, trying to get his subatomic hodiechrons to switch phases. "The school wouldn't have copies of those tests, would it?"

"Are you kidding? Old Paperwork makes me make copies of *everything.*" She stacked her silverware and milk carton on top of her plate. "My timing's always been off. In college I kept meeting guys who'd just been drafted." She stood up and pushed her chair in. "It'd be great if this time machine thing of Dr. Young's worked, wouldn't it? You'd be able to go back and get the timing right for once."

"Yes," Dr. Lejeune said. "It would."

Wendy called after school and told Carolyn they had an out-of-town volleyball game and could Carolyn bring her money for McDonald's and some Gatorade to drink on the bus. "Coach Nicotero says we have to have lots of electrolytes." She and Andrew weren't done testing Heidi Dreismeier, but he told her to go on and he'd finish the last few questions.

Carolyn ran by the grocery store and bought the Gatorade and a two-liter bottle of black cherry pop, which she had decided was the secret ingredient in the suicides. She took Wendy the Gatorade and the money and picked up Liz at the high school.

"Can you drop me over at Lisa's?" Liz said. "Harvard sent her a recruitment video. I don't know, though. How important do you think coed dorms are?"

"I don't know," Carolyn said, stopping in front of Lisa's. "We didn't have them."

"You're kidding. How did you meet guys?" She gathered up her books and got out of the car. "Oh, I almost forgot. I saw Dad. He said to tell you he and Linda had to go out to the mall to look at warmups. He said not to wait supper."

Carolyn went home and made herself a suicide, adding a very small amount of black cherry to try it out. Not only did we not have coed dorms, she thought, we weren't even allowed to have boys in the dorm. The dorm mother ran a bed check at midnight, and you could be expelled for sneaking a boy into your room, but I still managed somehow to meet boys, Liz. They sat next to me in class, and they danced with me at mixers, and they called me on the phone.

The phone rang. "Thanks a lot for running out on me," Andrew said.

"What happened?" Carolyn asked. "Did Heidi throw up?"

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"Worse. Her mother came in. It took me an hour and fifteen minutes to convince her Heidi doesn't need hodiechronicity lessons."

"Sherri says she read this article about Housewife Hysteria, and that's what she thinks Heidi's mother has," Carolyn said. She took a sip of the suicide. Black cherry was not the secret ingredient. "She can't find a socially acceptable outlet for her frustrations and longings."

"So she makes poor Heidi take belly-dancing. She spent forty-five minutes telling me about their Suzuki lessons. I felt like I was caught in some horrible time dilation. It serves me right for going into this business."

"How did you get into this business anyway?" Carolyn said, opening the refrigerator and peering inside to see if there were any other flavors of pop she could try.

"You mean why did I decide to study time? Well, I. . . ." There was a long pause and then he said in an odd voice, "Isn't that funny? I don't remember."

"You mean you just sort of gradually got into it?" There was a jar of maraschino cherries in the refrigerator door with one cherry left in it. She ate the cherry and poured the juice into the suicide. "You just drifted into it?"

"Temporal psychology isn't something you just drift into," he said. "This is ridiculous. I can't for the life of me remember."

"Maybe you still haven't gotten used to the altitude or something," Carolyn said, trying out the suicide. Maraschino cherry juice wasn't the secret ingredient either. "And you're probably under a lot of stress with the project and all. People forget things when they're under stress."

"You forget phone numbers and where you put your keys. You don't forget why you picked your chosen vocation."

"I can't remember whether I had the chicken pox," Carolyn said. "I even called my mother. She said I didn't have it when I was little, but she thought I'd had it when I was in college, and when she said that, it sounded right, but I can't for the life of me remember. It's like there's a big hole where the—"

"Nebraska State College," Andrew said.

"What?" Carolyn said.

"Your college. You went to Nebraska State College. That's where I know you from."

"You're kidding. You went to NSC, too?"

"No, Stanford, but—" He stopped. "You didn't ever go to California when you were in college, did you? For spring break or something?"

"No," Carolyn said. "Did you ever come to Nebraska?"

"No, and you still think I'm trying the old 'don't I know you from somewhere?' routine, don't you?"

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"No," Carolyn said. "I think you probably had a girlfriend in college that I remind you of."

"Not a chance. Stephanie Forrester was blonde and malicious."

She certainly was, Carolyn thought. Making him usher at her wedding.

"Brown and gold," he said suddenly.

"What?"

"Your school colors. Brown and gold."

She looked at the suicide and then poured it down the sink. Her school colors were brown and gold, and Andrew had never said a word about Stephanie Forrester until this minute, but she knew all about it, how the head usher was in love with her, too, how they'd gone out drinking clockstoppers and—

"I've got to go fix supper before my husband gets home," she said, and hung up the phone.

Dr. Lejeune had hoped Sherri would look for the tests right away, but when she went into the office after school, Sherri said, "Oh, I forgot all about that. Old Paperwork suddenly decided he wanted me to take an inventory of the supply closet, *including* counting the individual sheets of construction paper."

"How old is Mr. Paprocki?" Dr. Lejeune asked.

"Six, seven," Sherri said, counting the green. "Forty-three."

"Forty-three," Dr. Lejeune said thoughtfully, watching Sherri count. "Are you aware that obsessive attention to detail is a classic symptom of sexual repression?"

"Nineteen—you're kidding," Sherri said. She looked at the half-counted stack. "Where was I?"

"Nineteen," Dr. Lejeune said. "Are you sure he's never noticed you?"

"I'm sure. I've been wearing fuchsia for a week." She finished the stack and tamped it down and along the side to straighten the sheets back into line. "I'll try to look for those tests as soon as I finish this inventory."

Dr. Lejeune went down to the music room to see what she could find out from Carolyn, but she wasn't there and neither was Andrew. They had probably gotten lost in all the equipment, Dr. Lejeune thought, looking at the metal boxes stacked next to the piano and lined up under the blackboard. She wondered what he needed the photon counter for. And the spectrum analyzer. She didn't even know what some of this stuff was. She picked up a gray metal box that wasn't plugged into anything. There were no dials or markings on it except an on-off switch. Whatever it was, it was turned on.

The lights went off. "Hey!" Dr. Lejeune shouted. She took a step in the direction of the door. She crashed into the wastebasket. "Hey!" she said again.

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"Sorry," Dr. Young said, and the light came on. He came down the narrow ell and into the main part of the room, looking oddly guilty, as if she had just caught him at something. "I didn't know anybody was in here, and I saw the light on. It's a waste of electricity to leave a light on in an empty room and—" He stopped. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," Dr. Lejeune said, surprised.

He was looking at the box she was still holding. She set it down on the piano. "I was looking for Dr. Simons."

"What for?" he said suspiciously. "You weren't going to try to fix him up with Bev Frantz, were you?"

"I wanted to ask him what he thought of the children he'd tested so far," Dr. Lejeune said stiffly. "The computer isn't showing even a glimmer of a hodiechron, long or short. You should check before you turn out the light. It got black as a coal mine in here."

Dr. Young looked guilty all over again, and he still couldn't take his eyes off the box on the piano.

"I've got to go finish running the extrapolations," Dr. Lejeune said and went back up to the office.

Sherri was counting yellow construction paper. Dr. Lejeune asked if she could use the phone in Mr. Paprocki's office to call the university. "Forty-two, forty-three," Sherri said. "Sure. You have to fill out these." She handed Dr. Lejeune a sheaf of forms an inch thick.

"I'll call collect," Dr. Lejeune said. She went into the office, shut the door, and called the physics department. "I need to talk to somebody who worked on the temporal oscillator with Dr. Young," she told the graduate assistant who answered the phone. "I want to know exactly what it does."

"The main unit?"

"I suppose so," Dr. Lejeune said. She hadn't been aware the thing had more than one part.

"It has two functions. It produces the agitational stimuli, and it stores the temporal energy collected by the portable transmitter-receivers."

"Agitational stimuli?"

"Yes. A combination of subsonic emissions and subliminal messages that produce an excited emotional state in the experimental subjects."

Yes, and I'll bet I know what those subliminal messages are saying, Dr. Lejeune thought.

"I don't suppose this 'main unit' looks like a lava lamp, does it?"

"A lava lamp? Why on earth would a temporal oscillator look like a lava lamp?"

"Good question," Dr. Lejeune said. "Tell me about these portable transmitter-receivers."

It took two more days to finish kindergarten. Brendan James was the

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last one on the list. "Maybe we should just skip him," Carolyn said. "He's under a lot of stress."

"I'm not sure we have enough time left today anyway," Andrew said. It was nearly two-thirty. He could tell because the third grade was rattling past on their way out to recess. "Let's put it off till tomorrow, and I'll ask—"

The lights went out.

"Just a minute," Andrew said. "I'll get the flashlight. You can't see a thing in here."

That was an understatement. It was as black as pitch, as black as a mine shaft in here. It was so black it seemed to destroy his sense of direction as well. He took a step toward the piano and cracked his knee against the desk. Wrong way. He turned around and started in the opposite direction, his hands out in front of him.

"I'll try to find the light switch," Carolyn said, and there was a loud metallic crash.

"Stay right where you are," Andrew said. His hands hit the keyboard in a clatter of notes. "I'm almost there." He grabbed for the piano top and got hold of one of the square metal boxes and then the other. The flashlight wasn't there. He patted his hands over the surface of the piano. "Did you move the flashlight?" he asked.

"No," she said. "Did you?"

"No," he said, turning in the direction her voice was coming from. He crashed into the wastebasket. "I can't see a thing," he said. "It's black as the pit from pole to pole in here. Where are you?"

She didn't answer for a moment, but he didn't need her to tell him. He suddenly knew exactly where she was. He couldn't see a thing, there was not enough light for his eyes to even make an attempt at adjusting, but he knew exactly where she was.

"I'm by the blackboard, I think," she said. She wasn't. She was between the photon counter and the oscilloscope, and all he had to do was reach out his arm and pull her toward him. Her face was already turned up toward his in the pitch darkness. All he had to do was say her name.

And then what? Be the next piece of gossip for Sherri to spread? Well, you know what happened to Wendy and Liz's mother, don't you? She ran off with the hodiechronicity man.

"The blackboard's over here," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder and turning her gently toward it. He patted the surface with his free hand, completely sure now of where everything was. He could have walked straight down the narrow tunnel to the light switch and never have made a misstep. "You have a better idea than I do where the light switch is," he said, letting go of her shoulder. "Just keep your hand on the chalk tray, and when you get to the end of it, feel along the wall."

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"It's against the rules," she said. "The music teacher doesn't let the kids run their hands against the wall like this."

There was nothing in her voice to indicate she had any idea of how close they'd come to disaster, and probably she didn't. She was happily married to the gymnastics coach. She had a teenaged daughter who was getting ready for college and one who was out for volleyball. She probably hadn't even noticed that they couldn't move in here without touching each other.

"I'm sure the music teacher will make an exception this time," he said. "This is an emergency."

He could tell she had stopped, her hand already on the switch. "I know."

She turned on the light. "I guess I'd better go talk to the third grade teacher," she said and opened the door.

"I guess you'd better," he said.

After school Dr. Lejeune went up to the office to ask Mr. Paprocki if she could use his phone to place a long-distance call to Fermilab.

"I can't believe it," Sherri said. "The last single man in the state and he quits."

"Who quit?" Dr. Lejeune said. "Dr. Simons?"

"Yes. He came up about two-thirty and said he was leaving, to please tell Dr. Young he was going back to Tibet."

"Is that all he said? Did he leave a note?"

"No," Sherri said. "It's not fair. I went out and bought a whole new fuchsia wardrobe."

Dr. Lejeune went and found Dr. Young. He was in the third grade passing out lollipops. "Andrew's quit," she said.

"I know," he said. He handed her a lollipop.

"He says he's going to Tibet," she said. "Aren't you going to try and stop him?"

"Stop him?" he said. "Why would I do that? If he's unhappy, he's not much use to the project, is he? Besides," he unwrapped a lollipop, "you can run a video camera, can't you?"

"You sent all the way to Tibet for him. You said he was perfect."

"I know," he said, looking speculatively at the lollipop. "Well, we all make mistakes."

"I should have introduced him to Bev Frantz while I had the chance," Dr. Lejeune said under her breath.

"What?" Dr. Young said.

"I said, what about the project?"

"The project," Dr. Young said, sticking a lollipop in his mouth, "is proceeding right on schedule."

* * *

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"I've got bad news," Sherri said when Carolyn got to school in the morning.

"Don't tell me," Carolyn said, looking at the testing schedule. "Pam Lopez's mother ran off with the Lutheran minister."

Sherri didn't rise to the bait. "Dr. Simons left," she said.

"Oh," Carolyn said, moving Brendan James's name to the end of first grade. "Where did he go?"

"Tibet."

Good, Carolyn thought. Maybe now you'll stop acting like a college girl. You are not nineteen and living in the dorm. You are forty-one years old. You are married and have two children, and it is just as well he is in Tibet instead of down there in that music room where you can't even move without brushing against him. "Is Dr. Young going to continue the project?" she said.

"Yes."

Brendan James's mother was married and had two children, Carolyn thought, and what on earth is the matter with you? Brendan James's mother is a complete flake and always has been, and you love your husband, you love Liz and Wendy, and just because they are a little preoccupied with gymnastics and volleyball and college right now is no reason to act like a college girl with a crush. "I wonder who they're going to have replace him? Dr. Young?"

"I don't know. Honestly, you don't seem very upset that he left," Sherri said. "Well, maybe you don't care that the last single man around just departed for another continent, but I do."

Another continent, Carolyn thought. The university wasn't far enough. Even Duke University wasn't far enough. He had to go all the way to Tibet to get away from me.

"There's always Mr. Paprocki," Carolyn said and went down to the music room.

"Dr. Simons was called away suddenly," Dr. Young told her. He was showing Dr. Lejeune how to use the video camera. "Some kind of emergency," he said.

Some kind of emergency. "This is an emergency," Andrew had said, and he hadn't known the half of it. She had known exactly where he was, standing there in the pitch darkness. She hadn't been able to see her own hand in front of her face, she hadn't been able to find the spectrum analyzer even when she crashed into it, but she had known exactly where he was. All she would have had to do was put her hand on the back of his neck and pull him down to her.

"Sorry to interrupt," Sherri said, holding out a note to Carolyn. "I've got bad news. The senior high just called. Liz has the chicken pox."

* * *

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Andrew took the Greyhound bus back to the university. Someone had left a *McCall's* on the seat beside him. The cover had a picture of Elizabeth Taylor and the headline, "Are You Ready for an Affair? Our Test Can Help You Tell."

He took the test, answering the questions the way he thought Carolyn would. He remembered her saying her husband was a coach, so he answered yes to "I am lonely a lot of the time." He also answered yes to the question that said, "I sometimes fantasize about someone I know," even though he was sure that was wishful thinking.

Under the test it said, "Give yourself one point for every yes. 0-5: You're not ready. 6-10: Getting there. 11-15: Ready or not, here it comes. 16 and up: DANGER!

Carolyn got a four.

He stared out the window a while and then took the test himself, rewording the questions so they would apply to him. To eliminate sexual bias he answered no to every other PMS question and no to the one that said, "I find myself thinking a lot about an old flame." Stephanie Forrester was not who he thought about while he was staring out the window, and he didn't see how Carolyn Hendricks could qualify as an old flame when all he had ever done was know where she was in the dark.

He scored a twenty-two. He went back and marked all the PMS questions no. He still got a seventeen.

Dr. Young didn't seem any more upset about losing Carolyn than he had about losing Andrew. In fact, as he recited number strings to Troy Yoder, he looked positively cheerful. As soon as he was finished, Dr. Lejeune offered to go get the next first grader and went up to the office. "Have you found those tests yet?" she asked Sherri.

"No," Sherri said disgustedly. "I am knee-deep in chicken pox, and *he* decides the milk money accounts should be double entry. The second I get a chance I promise I'll look for them."

"It's okay," Dr. Lejeune said.

"If you're in a hurry, you might ask Heidi Dreismeier's mother," Sherri said. "She probably sneaked copies of the tests home to try on Heidi."

"Heidi Dreismeier's mother?" Dr. Lejeune asked. "How many people exactly did Dr. Young test?"

"Well, he started out by screening the staff and volunteers and all the homeroom mothers, but that was just an interview kind of thing. Then he narrowed it down to five or so and gave them the whole battery."

"Who were those five?"

"Well, Carolyn Hendricks, of course, and Heidi's mother, and Francine Williams. . . ."

"Shannon's mother?" Dr. Lejeune asked.

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"Yes, and who else?" She thought a minute. "Oh. Brendan James's mother. It's a good thing she didn't come in first, isn't it? And Maribeth Greenberg. She taught fourth grade here last year."

"How old was she?" Dr. Lejeune asked.

"Forty," Sherri said promptly. "We had a birthday party for her right before she quit."

"She didn't happen to run off with anybody, did she?"

"Maribeth?" Sherri said. "Are you kidding? She left to become a nun."

Liz didn't look too bad when Carolyn picked her up at the high school, but by the next morning she was covered. "What am I going to do?" she wailed. "My senior picture appointment is next week."

"I'll call and change it," Carolyn said, but the phone rang before she could find the number.

"More bad news," Sherri said.

"Wendy?" Carolyn said, thinking, please let them get it at the same time.

"No. Monica and Ricky Morales. I can't get in touch with their mother. She's in real estate. And your name was on the emergency card."

"I'll be right there," Carolyn said. She checked on Liz, who was sleeping on the living room couch, and drove to the elementary. On the way over she stopped at the grocery store and stocked up on 7-Up, popsicles, and calamine lotion. She also bought some ginger ale, which she had decided was the missing ingredient in Allison's suicides.

When she got to school, Monica and Ricky were sitting in the office looking flushed and bright-eyed. "We've had five cases since this morning," Sherri told her. "Five cases! And Heidi Dreismeier threw up, but I think it's just her nervous stomach." She helped Monica into her jacket. "I'll keep trying their mother. The office said she was showing apartments to some bachelor."

Carolyn took Monica and Ricky out to the car. Ricky promptly lay down on the back seat and wouldn't budge. Carolyn had to put the groceries in the trunk so Monica could sit up front beside her. She fastened Monica into the seat belt and started the car.

"Wait, wait!" Sherri yelled, pounding on the window on Monica's side. Carolyn leaned across and opened the window. "You've got another one," she said breathlessly. "It wasn't nervous stomach. Heidi's chest is covered with them. Oh, and I forgot to tell you. Don called. He tried to get you at home. He's going to be late. Two of his girls have got it, and he and Linda have to work up a beam routine with one of the freshmen."

Carolyn shut off the car. "Why do I have to take Heidi?" she said. "Her mother doesn't work."

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"She's at a three-day seminar on Spending More Time with Your Child."

Andrew went straight to Dr. Gillis's office as soon as he got back to the university to tell him he'd resigned. "Yes, yes, Max called and told me all about it," Dr. Gillis said. "It's too bad, but if they need you in Tibet, well, then, I guess our project will just have to wait. Now what can we do to expedite your getting back to Tibet?" He called Duke University and the U.S. envoy to China, made arrangements for Bev Frantz to give him a cholera booster, and found a place he could stay on campus until he left.

That last was a bad idea. The dorm room reminded him of the one he had had his junior year at Stanford when he had been in love with Stephanie Forrester. He should have met Carolyn Hendricks his junior year instead of Stephanie. She wouldn't have been Carolyn Hendricks then. She wouldn't have been married and had two kids and he could have fallen in love with her instead of the kind of girl who would ask her old boyfriends to usher at her wedding. The head usher had been an old boyfriend, too. He had told Andrew that after a half-dozen clock-stoppers or so, and they had both decided they needed a few more. He didn't know how many, but it must have been enough, because the next morning he hadn't been able to remember a thing and he was completely over Stephanie.

A sure-fire cure. It was too bad liquor wasn't allowed in the dorms.

Dr. Young refused to give up on the project, even though by the end of the first week there was almost no one left to test. "We'll work with the data we've got until the epidemic's over," he said, not at all upset. "How long does it take to get over the chicken pox?"

"Two weeks," Dr. Lejeune said, "but Sherri says these outbreaks usually last at least a month. Why don't we go back to the university until it's over? We could leave the equipment here."

"Absolutely not!" Dr. Young thundered. "It is that kind of attitude that has undermined this project from the start!" He stomped off, presumably to go work with the data they had.

We don't have any data, Dr. Lejeune thought going up to the office, and my attitude is not what's undermining this project. She wondered why he was so upset. Andrew's leaving hadn't upset him, Carolyn's leaving hadn't upset him, not even the chicken pox had upset him. But the suggestion of leaving here had turned the top of his bald head bright pink.

Sherri was dabbing calamine lotion on a fourth-grader. "I finally found the tests," she said. She handed them to Dr. Lejeune. "Sorry it took so

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long, but I had six kids go home this morning, three of them to Carolyn Hendricks' house."

Dr. Lejeune looked at the tests. The one on top was the Idelman-Ponoffo that they'd been giving the kids, and under it were an assortment of psychological tests.

"And as if that isn't bad enough, Old Paperwork decides he wants me to alphabetize the field trip release slips."

The last test was something called the Rick. Dr. Lejeune didn't recognize it. She asked Sherri if she could use Mr. Paprocki's office and placed a call to the psych department at the university.

"It tests logical thinking, responsibility, and devotion to duty," the graduate assistant said.

"How about fidelity?" Dr. Lejeune asked.

"Oh, yes. In fact, Dr. Young over in the physics department just used it in a project of his. He wanted to test the likelihood of affairs among forty-year-olds."

"Say someone scored a six hundred ninety-two on the Rick, what would their chances of having an extramarital affair be?"

"Six hundred ninety-two?" the graduate assistant said. "Nonexistent. Seven hundred's a perfect score."

Perfect, Dr. Lejeune thought. "You wouldn't happen to have Dr. Andrew Simons' score on file, would you?"

"I know Dr. Young did a Rick on him, but I'm not sure where it—"

"Never mind," Dr. Lejeune said. "I already know what he got."

Carolyn checked Wendy's stomach every morning for two weeks, but she didn't show any signs of getting the chicken pox, even though at one point Carolyn had five patients on Wendy's bed, her and Don's bed, and the family room couch. "I can't get sick," Wendy told her, yanking her T-shirt down after Carolyn had checked her stomach. "We've got a game this afternoon. I have to start. Sarah Perkins got sick yesterday. Coach Nicotero had to call a time-out and everything."

That's what I need, Carolyn thought, driving her to practice. A time-out. Only there aren't any in this game.

"I've narrowed it down to Vassar, Carleton, and Tufts," Liz said when Carolyn got back. She was lying on the couch dabbing calamine lotion on her legs and reading college catalogs. "How important do you think VCR's in the dorms are, Mom?"

The phone rang. "I am *so* sorry to do this to you," Sherri said, "but I didn't know what else to do. It's Shannon Williams. I called her mother at the bank. Do you think I should have done that?"

"Was she there?"

"I don't know," Sherri said, lowering her voice. "*He* answered the phone

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and he said she wasn't there, but he sounded really angry and I think she was. So can you come pick her up?"

"I'll be right there," Carolyn said.

She settled Erin in Wendy's bed with her popsicle and some of Wendy's comics. "I've got to go get Shannon Williams," she told Liz, who had given up on the catalogs and was watching "All My Children."

"Is her mother in real estate, too?"

"No," Carolyn said. Her mother is in deep trouble if her husband finds out. And how did that happen? I know how it happened, Carolyn thought. She knew exactly where he was, and she wasn't thinking about her husband or her kids because right then they didn't exist. Talk about time displacement. It was as if that moment, as she stood there in the dark, knowing all she had to do was put her hand on the back of his neck and pull him down to her, was out of time altogether.

Only it wasn't. Shannon Williams's mother was just kidding herself that it was. It would be wonderful if people could step out of time as Dr. Young seemed to think they could, go back to when they were in college and unencumbered with families and responsibilities, but they couldn't. And standing there in the dark Shannon's mother should have been thinking about how much this was going to hurt her husband. She should have been thinking about who was going to take Shannon to volleyball practice and the orthodontist after the divorce was over.

The phone rang. It was Don. "How are things going?" he asked.

"Great," she said. "Erin Peterson is on the couch, I am on my way to pick up Shannon Williams, we are all out of popsicles *and* calamine lotion, and you have just called to tell me you're going to be late again."

"Yeah," he said, "I'm sorry to do this to you when you've got all those kids to take care of, but somebody erased all the floor ex music, and we've got a big invitational tomorrow. Luckily, Linda's got a dual tape deck at her apartment so we're going over there. I'll get home as soon as I can. And listen, you take it easy. You sound terrible."

"Thank you," Carolyn said coldly. She opened the refrigerator. They were all out of pop, too.

"That's what I mean. You're so edgy. Linda thinks you're doing way too much with all these poxy kids. She says a woman your age has to be careful not to overdo."

"Or my arthritis might kick up again?" she said. She hung up, called the bank, and asked for the head loan officer.

"You tell Shannon Williams's mother that I don't care if she's there or not, but she has a sick child and she'd better come pick her up," she said and hung up.

The phone rang. "I have bad news," Sherri said.

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"I don't care who it is," Carolyn said. "Their mother has got to come and get them."

"It's Wendy," Sherri said.

By the end of three weeks, a few scabby children had started to trickle back, but Dr. Young showed no interest in screening them.

"If we're not going to use the music room, why don't we at least move some of that equipment out so the music teacher can get back in?" Dr. Lejeune suggested.

"You are not moving anything anywhere," Dr. Young shouted, his bald head turning fuchsia. "It is that kind of attitude—"

"I know, I know," Dr. Lejeune said, but she went down to the music room anyway. She could at least shift things around so the music teacher could get to the piano.

She dismantled the video camera and stuck it in the music cupboard. At the back between two xylophones was a flashlight. That would come in handy if the lights went out, Dr. Lejeune thought. She put it in her pocket and sidled over to the piano to get the temporal oscillator. The gray box that didn't plug into anything was still on top of the piano, but the two smaller flat ones weren't.

She went upstairs to the office and called Carolyn. "Did Dr. Young send anything home with you?" she asked.

"The interview transcripts," Carolyn said, sounding exhausted. "He thought I might have time to go over them, but I've got a whole bunch of—"

"There wouldn't be a flat gray box in with them, would there?" Dr. Lejeune interrupted.

"I don't think so. Just a minute," Carolyn said. She was gone a long time. "Yeah, it's here. I don't know how it got in with the transcripts. Do you want me to bring it back to school?"

"No," Dr. Lejeune said. "We can get it when we pick up the transcripts. Don't worry about it."

"Is the other one missing, too? There were two of them on top of the piano."

"No, it's not missing," Dr. Lejeune said. "I know right where it is."

Even with Dr. Gillis helping, it took three weeks to arrange everything, and then Andrew had trouble getting a flight to L.A. The one he finally got on was jammed. He was sandwiched in between a sleeping man and a little girl. When the flight attendant came around with the drinks cart he ordered a clockstopper.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said. "I don't know that drink. How is it made?"

"I wanta Coke," the little girl said.

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"Just give me a beer and a wine and I'll mix it myself," he said.

"I'm sorry, sir. I can only sell you one drink at a time."

"Fine," he said, pointing at the sleeping man in the window seat. "Give him a beer and me a wine, and I'll pay for both of them."

The flight attendant slapped a napkin down on his tray and followed it with a vile-looking pinkish brown drink in a squat plastic glass. It was not anywhere near the amount to do anything but taste the way it looked. He drank it anyway.

The little girl picked her glass up with both hands and then tried to maneuver the straw into her mouth by moving the glass around and grabbing for it with her teeth. "I'm going to see my mom," she said between grabs. "She lives in Santa Monica. My dad lives in Philadelphia. They're divorced."

"Oh?" Andrew said. He twisted around in his seat and tried to catch the attendant's eye but the cart was already fifteen rows back.

"My mom went to California to find herself," the little girl said. She put down her glass and began blowing bubbles into it with the straw. "She lives with this guy named Carlos. He plays tennis."

The drinks cart disappeared into the recesses of the plane.

"My dad has a new girlfriend named Heather."

A different flight attendant came up with headphones. "Would you like to see the movie? It's Nostalgia Month."

"What's the movie?" the little girl said, bending her straw in half and trying to drink upside down.

"*An Affair to Remember.*"

Andrew bought a head set. He put it on, turned the volume all the way down, and closed his eyes.

"My psychiatrist says the divorce has had a traumatic effect on me," the little girl said, holding her straw above her head and catching the drips with her tongue. "He says I feel abandoned and neglected."

Andrew took off the headphones and put them on the little girl. He put his seat back, snatched the blanket away from the sleeping man, and stared out the window of the plane. It looked like it was snowing.

Dr. Lejeune waited till nearly all the teachers had left the building and then went down to the music room and got the gray box with the on-off switch. She took it upstairs to the office and asked Sherri where Mr. Paprocki was.

"He's got late bus duty," Sherri said. "One of the second-grade teachers went home with the chicken pox at noon."

"Oh," Dr. Lejeune said. "Did he tell you about the music room?"

Sherri shook her head. She looked a little haggard, and she wasn't wearing fuchsia, but that wouldn't matter.

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"He wants you to file all the sheet music according to key signature," she said.

As soon as Sherri started downstairs, Dr. Lejeune walked out to the playground. She met Mr. Paprocki coming in. "Sherri sent me to get you. She's in the music room. I'm afraid she's coming down with the chicken pox."

Mr. Paprocki took off at a dead run. Dr. Lejeune followed, still carrying the gray box, and as soon as he was all the way in the music room, she turned off the light.

"Hey!" Sherri and Mr. Paprocki said.

Dr. Lejeune locked the door and went up to the kindergarten. "I want to know what's going on," she said.

Dr. Young was sitting at the computer. "Going on?" he said, turning around. "What do you mean?" He saw the gray box. The top of his bald head went pale. "What are you doing with that?"

"I'm turning the temporal oscillator off in about ten seconds if you don't tell me what's going on," she said, holding her hand over the switch. "This *is* the temporal oscillator, isn't it? Along with the portable transmitter-receivers you sent home with Carolyn—where's Andrew Simons'? In his luggage?"

"Yes," Dr. Young said. "Don't—what do you want to know?"

"I want to know what your project really is, and don't tell me you're testing kindergarteners' hodiechrons, because I know that's just a blind," she said. "What are you really doing? You hired a housewife whose husband is never home and a psychologist who hasn't had sex in five years and you stuck them down in a tiny room where they couldn't move without touching each other, and then you turned off the lights and started subsonically whispering in their ears." She moved her hand closer to the switch. "You obviously wanted them to have an affair, and what I want to know is why."

"I didn't want them to have an affair," he said.

"I don't believe you," she said, taking hold of the switch.

"It's true! All right, all right, I'll tell you everything! Just take your hand away from the switch."

Dr. Lejeune did. Dr. Young sank down on one of the tiny kindergarten chairs. "I needed to have maximum agitation, but subsonics and subliminals aren't enough to produce an excited emotional state, so I had to have subjects who were already under stress. People going through midlife crises experience a lot of stress. They worry about growing old, they think about death, they long for the past. Most of them find some outlet for that longing—"

"Like running off with the Make Me Marvy man," Dr. Lejeune said.

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"Or finding God," Dr. Young said, "or becoming obsessive about their children or their work."

"But people who score a six-ninety on the Rick don't have any outlets."

"Right. So their hodiechrons would be in a maximum state of agitation."

"And if they weren't, you'd see to it that they were," Dr. Lejeune said grimly. "What did you do besides the subsonics? Hire Sherri to talk about Shannon Williams' mother's boyfriend at the bank? Release some chicken pox virus into the air?"

"I had nothing to do with Sherri or the chicken pox," he said stiffly. "I was simply trying to maximize their agitation so their hodiechrons would be destabilized. Hodiechrons can't be switched when they're stable."

"What about Carolyn and Andrew?"

"They're simply supplying temporal energy which is then stored in the oscillator. The actual time displacement experiments will be carried out on laboratory rats."

"Oh. They're simply supplying temporal energy. And what about what's going to happen to them afterwards?"

"Nothing's going to happen to them afterwards," Dr. Young said, looking as if he was getting ready to lunge for the storage unit. "The temporal oscillator has no effect on them whatsoever."

"No effect on them? What about all the feelings you've churned up? What are they supposed to do with those?"

"They'll get over them as soon as they're removed from contact with the temporal oscillator. Their agitation level will gradually drop back to normal, and they'll forget all about it. I don't know what you're so worried about. They can't have an affair with Andrew on the way to Tibet, and I plan to send Linda back to central casting as soon as—"

"You hired Linda!" Dr. Lejeune said, her hand trembling on the switch.

"I had to. Carolyn scored a six-ninety on the Rick. Nobody else got above a five hundred. But she was too happily married."

"And you wanted maximum agitation, so you had to ruin her marriage."

"Oh, I don't think so," Dr. Young said, walking carefully toward her. "Her husband scored a four-eighty, and Linda was under strict orders—"

"You wanted maximum agitation," Dr. Lejeune said, so angry she could hardly speak, "so you took probably the only two people left in the world who wouldn't cheat on their spouses and you poked and prodded them and subjected them to subliminals till they were in love and miserable, and you planned to go off and leave them like that, sitting ducks for the next Tibetan bar girl or colors consultant to come along, didn't you? Didn't you?"

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Dr. Young took a few more cautious steps forward. "I think you're exaggerating. They scored above six hundred on the Rick. They won't go off with someone else. Andrew will go back to the lamasery and Carolyn will go back to her husband."

"And what about all the resentment and distrust and desire that's been built up in the meantime? What about all that longing for the past?"

"It will be used in my time displacement experiments," Dr. Young said.

"The hell it will."

Dr. Young grabbed for the temporal oscillator and got it away from her before she could flip the switch. "I couldn't let you turn it off," he said. "There's no telling what the sudden release of all that temporal energy might do."

"It's too late," Dr. Lejeune said. "I already did."

Linda called just after Don left for the state meet. "I was just wondering if I should bring an overnight bag. The weather report looks like we might have to stay overnight. Is it still chicken pox city over there?"

"Yes," Carolyn said, "and it's highly contagious so you'd better not get too close to Don. He's never had the chicken pox, and it would be terrible if you got it with those French cut leotards and all."

After she hung up, she went in and checked on the patients. Liz was asleep on the couch with a Texas A & M brochure in her hand. Susy Hopkins was in her and Don's bed. Her mother had called to say she had to work the late shift in the pediatrics ward because of all the chicken pox. Wendy still hadn't finished breaking out. She looked flushed.

Carolyn put her hand on Wendy's forehead, expecting it to be warm, but it felt cool. She felt her own forehead. Warm, too warm. I must not have had the chicken pox after all, she thought. But she had. In college. She'd been the only person in her whole dorm to get it, and the doctor hadn't been able to figure out how she'd caught it.

She covered Wendy up. There was an afghan at the foot of the bed. She took it into Liz's room and lay down under it.

She had been in the infirmary ten days, and the doctor had made her make a list of everybody she might have exposed, and she had written Don's name down because he sat next to her in psychology and that was how they met.

She was shivering badly, hunched under the too-small afghan. Her throat ached. I'm definitely catching chicken pox, she thought. Only I can't be. I had it fall quarter of my sophomore year. The quarter Allison was in Europe. I remember now. She put her hand under her burning cheek and fell asleep.

The lights went out, and he couldn't see anything. He took a step

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forward and crashed into something. A wastebasket. He didn't remember there being a wastebasket next to the bar. He tried to set it back up and cracked his knee against something else. A chair. There hadn't been any chairs in the bar either. And no bar stools either. He and Stephanie Forrester's head usher had had to kind of lean on the bar to drink their clockstoppers. He must be back in his dorm room.

"Who's there?" a female voice said. "Is somebody there?"

He was not in his room. He took a step backward and crashed into the wastebasket again.

"I know there's somebody there," the voice said, sounding frightened. He heard a crash, and then she must have opened the curtains or pulled up a shade or something because he could see her in the pale light thrown from a street lamp outside.

She was sitting up on a bed, wrapped in a blanket on top of the covers. There was a book open on the bed beside her. She must have fallen asleep reading. There was a clock on the desk. It said three-thirty. The lamp she'd just tried to turn on was lying on its side on the floor. He moved to pick it up.

"Don't you come near me!" the girl said, scrambling back to the head of the bed, the blanket held up tight against her. "How did you get in here?"

"I don't know," he said. He looked around the room. There was a chain on the door. The window. Maybe he'd come in the window and shut it behind him. It was snowing. Snowflakes drifted past the street lamp outside, and he could see it piled up on the windowsill. "I don't know," he said helplessly.

The girl was looking at the window and the chained door, too. "Are you a friend of Allison's?" she asked.

"No." Stephanie Forrester. He had been ushering at Stephanie Forrester's wedding and. . . . "Are you a friend of Stephanie's?"

"No," she said. "Are you drunk?"

That must be it. He was drunk. It would explain a number of things, such as why he couldn't remember what he was doing in some strange girl's room in the middle of the night. "I'm drunk," he said, suddenly remembering. "I was drinking clockstoppers with Stephanie's head usher. Beer and wine. Together."

"That'll do it," she said, not sounding particularly frightened anymore. She had let the blanket slip a little, and he could see that she was wearing a brown T-shirt that barely covered her hips. Nebraska State College, the yellow letters on the T-shirt said. He tried not to feel worried about that. And the snow.

There was a simple explanation for all this. It had started snowing

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while he and the head usher were in the bar. It snowed sometimes in California. Her boyfriend from Nebraska had given her the T-shirt.

"Do you have a boyfriend?" he said, and instantly regretted it. She looked wildly around for something to defend herself with. "Your T-shirt," he said hastily. "I figured your boyfriend gave it to you or something since it's not from this school."

"It *is* from this school," she said. "Nebraska State College."

"In Nebraska?" he said. He grabbed for the back of the desk chair and almost tipped it over again.

"Where exactly were you drinking these clockstoppers?" the girl asked.

"California."

Neither of them said anything for a minute. Finally the girl said, "Don't you remember anything about how you got here?"

"Yes," he said. "I was . . . no."

"It'll come to you if you don't think about it," the girl said, and then looked scared. "I feel like I said that before, or somebody said it to me. Only I have this funny feeling it hasn't happened yet."

She leaned forward on her hands and looked hard at him. "I know you," she said. "You're a temporal psychologist."

"I'm an English major," he said. "I was drinking clockstoppers with Stephanie Forrester's head usher, and all of a sudden it got as black as—"

"The pit from pole to pole," the girl said.

He knocked over the chair. "I know you," he said. "You're Carolyn Hendricks."

She shook her head. "I'm Carolyn Rutherford."

"That's your maiden name. Your married name is Hendricks."

"I'm not married," she said, starting to look scared again.

"Not yet you're not. But you will be, you'll have two daughters."

"You're Dr. Andrew Simons," she said suddenly. "You spent the last five years in Tibet studying déjà vu."

"I spent the last five years in high school and going to Stanford. And why would I study déjà vu? I'm an English major."

"*Were* an English major. I think after tonight you'll probably switch your major to psychology." She sat back on her heels. "Hendricks, huh? I think there's a guy named Hendricks in my psych class."

"But you haven't met him yet," he said, no longer bewildered, no longer uneasy. "And I haven't met you yet. But I will. In about twenty years."

"Yes," she said, "and I'll be married and have two daughters, and you'll be in Tibet."

"And there won't be any possible way for us to get together because the timing will be all wrong," he said.

"All things are possible," she said. "It's three-thirty." She smiled a

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little, leaning toward him on her hands. "They never check the rooms after midnight."

"What about your roommate?" he said, and her sudden look of surprised joy almost staggered him.

"Oh," she said happily, "this is the quarter Allison's in Europe."

"I couldn't find you," Don said. He was standing over her with a mug.

"Susy was in our bed," she said sleepily. "How was the meet?" She sat up and pulled the afghan over her knees.

"We took second." He sat down on the bed and handed her the mug. "Jennifer Whipple got sick and couldn't do her bar routine, and Linda quit. How're you doing?"

"Fine," she said, taking a sip. "What is this?"

"A suicide," he said. "I remembered you were crazy about them in college, so I stopped at the 7-Eleven and bought some ginger ale and—"

"Ginger ale!" Carolyn said. "That was what I couldn't remember." She took another sip. "It tastes just like the ones Allison used to make. Oh, and speaking of Allison, I finally remembered when I had the chicken pox. It was the quarter Allison was in Europe. It was the strangest thing. I . . . Linda quit?"

"Halfway through the vaulting. She didn't even come home on the bus with us. I tried to call you."

"To tell me she quit?" she said.

"No. To tell you you'd had the chicken pox. Jennifer got sick and all of a sudden I remembered you'd had it in college. It beats me how I could have forgotten since that's how we met. I came to see you in the infirmary."

"I know," Carolyn said. "The doctor made me make a list of who I might have exposed, and I put your name down because you sat next to me in my psych class."

"You looked terrible," he said, grinning at her. "You were all covered with scabs. And sitting there looking at you I had this funny kind of vision of the two of us married with two kids and both of them with the chicken pox. I don't think Linda understood that part."

"You told Linda?"

"Yeah. She was talking about how touchy you were on the phone. She said nobody could be that crabby unless they were coming down with something, and all of a sudden I remembered how I'd met you and so I told her."

"No wonder she quit," Carolyn said.

"Yeah, I guess it was probably boring for a kid like her to have to listen to an old geezer like me talking about things that happened a long

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time ago. The funny thing is, it doesn't feel like a long time ago, though, you know. It feels like it just happened yesterday."

"I know," Carolyn said. "That isn't the only funny thing. I—"

"Listen, honey, I've got to go back to school," Don said. He patted her knee. "I've got to unload the equipment. I just thought I'd better come check on you since you didn't answer the phone."

She draped the afghan over her shoulders and followed him into the living room. "I didn't hear it ring," she said. "And that's not the only funny thing. I—"

"I decided on a college," Liz said. She was sitting up on the couch dabbing calamine lotion on her arms. "NSC."

"NSC?" Carolyn said. "I thought you'd narrowed it down to Vassar, Carleton, and Tufts."

"Well, I had, but I couldn't sleep because I was itching, and I got to thinking about how you and Dad are always saying how great NSC was, so I decided to go there instead."

"It was great," Don said. "That's where I met your mother. She had the chicken pox and—"

"I *know*," Liz said. "You've told that story about a million times."

"The old geezer strikes again," Don said. He kissed Carolyn. "I'll be back in an hour if I don't suddenly go senile while I'm unloading the bus." He kissed Carolyn again.

"I don't see how having the chicken pox could have been all that romantic," Liz said after he'd left.

"It was," Carolyn said.

Dr. Lejeune went to see Andrew in the university infirmary. "Sherri Paprocki said to say hello," she said. "She wants to know how you managed to get the chicken pox. The incubation period is only two weeks, and you didn't catch it till five weeks after you'd left."

"On the plane to L.A. I sat next to a little girl who must have been contagious," he said. "It's a good thing I decided not to go to Tibet."

"Excuse me," Bev Frantz said. She came in with a thermometer. "I need to take your temp."

"Great," Andrew said. "I was hoping I'd see you agai—"

She stuck the thermometer in his mouth and looked at the box. He smiled up at her. She concentrated fiercely on the LED readout.

He didn't look sick except for the calamine-covered scabs all over his face and arms. In fact, he looked better than Dr. Lejeune had ever seen him look. Happier.

The box beeped. Bev took the sensor out of his mouth and shoved it back in its carrier. She turned to Dr. Lejeune. "Dr. Young's been asking for you."

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"You really should go see him," Andrew said. "I think he wants to apologize."

"You're the one he should apologize to," she said, and then looked closely at him. "Or should he? Are you sure you got the chicken pox from that little girl?"

"Max really cares about you, you know," Andrew said. "He told me the reason he started the project in the first place was to impress you."

"Hmm," Dr. Lejeune said. She told Andrew goodbye and went out in the hall.

"I wondered if I could talk to you about Dr. Simons for a minute," Bev said. "I really like him, but when he was in here before for his cholera booster, I got the idea he was in love with somebody else."

"He was," Dr. Lejeune said. "A girl he knew in college. But that was a long time ago. I wouldn't worry about it."

She started out the door and then turned around and went into Max's room. He looked terrible. He had chicken pox on the top of his bald head and he was wearing a pair of mittens that were taped at the wrist. "Well?" he said. "Has he asked her out yet?"

"Who?" Dr. Lejeune said.

"Andrew. Has he asked Bev out? I told him he'd better latch onto her while he still has the chance. I've been trying to get them together ever since I got in here. It's the least I can do."

"I thought you said matchmaking was a substitute for sex."

"It is," he said. "So was my time machine. I wanted to go back in time and be young again."

"You're not that old. You caught the chicken pox, didn't you?"

"Nothing happened, did you know that? All that energy released at once, and nothing. Carolyn slept through the whole thing." He reached up with his mittened hand to scratch his face and then laid his hand back in his lap. She had never felt so sorry for anyone in her whole life.

"Would you like me to rub on some calamine?" she asked.

"Nothing happened to him either."

"He caught the chicken pox." She opened the bottle of calamine and dabbed some on his cheek. "Did you know when Carolyn had it in college, she was the only person in her dorm to get it? Nobody could figure out where she caught it from. Personally, I think she caught it from that poxy bunch of kids at her house. And now Andrew has the chicken pox and nobody can figure out where he got it from."

"He said he caught it from a little girl he sat next to on the plane."

"Personally, I think he caught it from Carolyn." She stood up and dabbed calamine on the top of his head.

"You mean—" he said, perking up noticeably.

"Your theory says that an entire hodiechron could be displaced. In-

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cluding chicken pox viruses. Suppose Carolyn caught the chicken pox from one of those kids she was taking care of and was contagious but she didn't have any symptoms yet. Suppose she gave the chicken pox to Andrew when they were in college."

"We could call the airlines and find out who the little girl was and if she came down with the chicken pox," he said excitedly. He began trying to get the tape off his wrists with his mittened hands. "We can run the experiment again. Heidi Dreismeier's mother scored a four-ninety, and we can surely find—" He stopped and laid his hands back in his lap. "We can't run the experiment again. You were right. I had no business messing with people's lives."

"Who said anything about messing with people's lives? Why can't we run the experiment on ourselves? I worry about being old, I long for the past, and I'm about as desperate for sex as they come. I'd love to be shut in a cramped little room with you."

Dr. Young took hold of her hands with his mittened ones. "I don't think you're old," he said. He leaned forward to peck her on the cheek.

Bev came in carrying her thermometer. "Oops, sorry," she said. "I'm obviously in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"We may be able to do something about that," Dr. Lejeune said. ●

THE ODYSSEUS WHO RETURNED

There was no going home without the dead;
The ghosts he raised on that fantastic shore
Were souvenirs from his successful war.
Those faces that once screamed and burned and bled
Spoke with him and remained inside his head.
Nothing could hold the shape it had before:
His spring was nettles and his summer sour,
So autumn was a season gone to seed,
His winter dark dreams of a darker bed.
Penelope could not stroke him into peace
(Since love was not the substance of his need).
He saw the blackbird's thrust into the grass;
With satisfaction watched the hawk's fierce pass,
And said, "Killing is the only act which lasts."

—Ace G. Pilkington

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ON BOOKS by Norman Spinrad

POLITICAL SCIENCE FICTION

From the perspective of twenty-first century historians, the most amazing aspect of the Reagan years may not be the quadrupling of the national debt, or the caponization of the American labor movement, or the destruction of the family farm, or the gigantic military build-up, or the conversion of the United States into a debtor nation, or the militarization of the space program, but the eerie political indifference which greeted these drastic transformations.

Technically speaking, it has been quite a political achievement whether you approve of the results or not. Reagan came to office as someone perceived as far right of center, railing against the huge Carter budget deficits (almost thirty billion dollars a year of red ink), promising to balance the budget, build up the nation's defenses, and cut taxes.

Over the course of eight years, the Reagan Administration raised the annual budget deficit by an order of magnitude, turned the world's biggest creditor nation into the world's biggest debtor nation, broke the American labor movement, gave huge tax cuts to the rich, bankrupted the American family farmer, and presided over the destruction of the civilian space program.

And got away with it.

I mean, think about it. Lyndon Johnson was hounded from office over one admittedly big mistake, the Viet Nam War. Richard Nixon was forced to resign over one admittedly putrid scandal. Jimmy Carter's Presidency was destroyed over his admittedly disastrous handling of the Iranian hostage crisis.

Can you imagine what would have happened if any of them had attempted to pull off anything remotely as radical as the so-called Reagan Revolution? Remember the riots and demonstrations of the 1960s? Remember the political passions of the 1970s? All of which were over issues far less drastic than concessionary labor contracts, gigantic military budgets, the conglomeritization of American agriculture, the War on Drugs, the bankrupting of America, the death of the civilian space program.

And yet the country has for the most part swallowed all of this whole with scarcely a burp of protest. The ultimate achievement of

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the Reagan Administration is that it somehow managed to reassemble an American consensus reality, to make it the official reality, and to promulgate it so successfully as to depoliticize politics itself.

What does the depoliticization of American politics have to do with science fiction?

More than you might think.

All fiction is to some extent a mirror of the times in which it is written and at least to a minor degree a shaper of those times, and this is peculiarly true of science fiction. It was arguably born with the utopian novels of the Age of Reason and the early nineteenth century, grew up with the technocratic logical positivism of the early twentieth century, came to full flower with the golden age of the American space program. During the 1950s, it was one of the few literary realms where oblique criticism of McCarthyism was possible, yet it also expressed in full the anti-Communist paranoia of the era, as well as the fear of nuclear holocaust. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the rise and fall of the Counterculture was mirrored within the genre by the New Wave versus traditionalist controversy, and many were the novels thematically concerned with the political and social questions raised by the Viet Nam war.

And in the early to late mid-1980s, science fiction suffered, if that is the word, a kind of depoliticization that mirrored the depoliticization of American politics, and, who knows, which may have been one of the minor contributing causes thereof.

This is not the place to argue political substance, nor is this the place to ponder how the feat was achieved, but perhaps this *is* the time and place to consider the political aspects of science fiction, now that the Reagan era has drawn to a close, now that there are signs that a renaissance of political science fiction is in the making.

Writers, and particularly science fiction writers, have long been advised to use a telegram if they want to send a message, and stick to writing for Joe's beer money, and it is certainly true that the story must be central, that propaganda is the death of art, and that the political novel is always in danger of degenerating into didacticism.

But on the other hand it is damn difficult to write genuine science fiction that is also genuinely apolitical.

What do I mean by "genuine science fiction"?

What do I mean by "genuinely apolitical"?

By genuine science fiction, I mean science fiction which places its characters in a believable and fully-rounded created reality.

By genuinely apolitical science fiction, I mean science fiction that makes absolutely no statement or assumption about the relationship between the individual and the body politic.

Do you begin to see the inherent contradiction?

How *can* you place your charac-

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ters in a fully-rounded created reality without at least making assumptions about the relationship between the human individual and the human collectivity? Even if you're writing about a single individual in total isolation —William Golding's *Pincher Martin*, for rare example — there will still be such assumptions in the character's memory. Even Tarzan of the apes grew up in a social context. Indeed, the very language contains assumptions about the relationship between the individual and the collectivity—ask any feminist.

But although it is virtually impossible to write truly *apolitical* science fiction in this sense, that certainly does not mean that genuine *political* science fiction has been all that common, particularly during the last ten years or so.

The Reagan Administration, for example, can hardly be called apolitical, nor is the official reality it has successfully promulgated without its political assumptions, but it has not examined those assumptions closely, probably is not very self-conscious of their nature *as* assumptions, and has, one way or another, been rather successful in removing those political assumptions as central subjects of American political discourse, and that is what I mean by the "depoliticization of politics."

So too with much science fiction, particularly much science fiction written and published during the congruent era. It is virtually impossible to write genuine science fiction without underlying political assumptions, but it is all too easy to forget that they *are* assumptions, not timeless verities, and to end up writing science fiction that is not apolitical but that is not consciously political either.

Just as genuine political discourse and debate is about conflicting theories and philosophies of the proper relationship between the individual and the body politic, so is genuine political science fiction centrally concerned with these same issues and themes, and self-consciously so. Almost all science fiction has its underlying political assumptions, which is to say that almost no science fiction is really politically neutral, but only political science fiction is centrally concerned with examining political assumptions, and hence truly politically engaged.

Take, for example, survivalist science fiction, which has certainly become a prominent subgenre during recent years. This stuff can be well-written or poorly written, it can be didactic or superficially nonpolitical, but almost all of it is based on the same set of political assumptions.

The stated assumption is, of course, that something has happened, usually a nuclear war, to destroy the structure of modern civilization, and the story then becomes the struggle of the characters to survive after the fall. The *unstated and unexamined* assumptions are that civilization will inev-

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itably unravel under the pressure of severe catastrophe and that those who survive will compete savagely and desperately for what remains.

This is certainly a legitimate political viewpoint when presented as such, but it seldom is, which is to say that such literature seldom allows or ponders the opposite possibility, namely that catastrophe might teach the survivors the dangers of chauvinism and unrestricted rugged individualism and cause them to build a successor society based on a greater degree of communal collectivity.

Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* is a self-consciously political novel that takes something like this viewpoint, as is David Brin's *The Postman* up to a point, and my own *Songs from the Stars*, and in a strange sort of extremis Philip José Farmer's *Tongues of the Moon*, in which the conflict is between good communists and bad communists.

But for the most part Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* has been the template for this sort of material, upon which science fiction would seem to have pretty much reached an unexamined political consensus. Which is to say that within the literature, the politics of survivalism, with its widely accepted set of unexamined assumptions, has been pretty well depoliticized.

How does this reduction of controversial political issues to depoliticized underlying assumptions occur? After all, such a process should *not* be natural to science fiction, with its tradition of viewing human society from the viewpoint of a "man from Mars," as Heinlein himself did quite literally in *Stranger in a Strange Land.*

No easy question to answer, for to fully understand such a process would probably be to understand how the Reagan Administration achieved much the same thing in the real world with such previously politically controversial issues as the freedom to alter one's own consciousness, the graduated income tax, the conglomeritization of agriculture, non-interference in the internal affairs of other sovereign states.

There probably isn't any one easy answer. Sometimes the answer is blatantly political, as in the current near-impossibility of publishing fiction that says anything unabashedly positive about the use of mind-altering drugs or about the long unstated ban in American SF on works that have anything positive to say about communism. Sometimes the answer is subtly commercial, as with the difficulty in distributing SF with a homosexual content.

Sometimes the answer is communal and internal, as with the general outrage in the SF community against Barry Malzberg's fine *Beyond Apollo*, a novel which argued that human beings are psychologically unsuited for space travel. Frequently the answer is macrocultural, for science fiction writers are products of their cultures, too, and every culture es-

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chews certain concepts as literally unthinkable, even to the likes of us.

Sometimes, ironically enough, it is the subtle pressures of rather subtle politics which tend to depoliticize politically charged thematic material, as with *Chernobyl* by Frederik Pohl, a writer not usually noted for maintaining pristine political blandness.

Chernobyl is a kind of docunovel of the nuclear disaster in question, Pohl has certainly written sophisticated politically engaged science fiction in the past, and one would have thought, or at any rate hoped, that he would have really engaged this politically charged and complex material.

Were flaws inherent in the Soviet system responsible for the debacle? Is nuclear power itself inherently unsafe? Did the Soviet Union have the moral obligation to compensate the countries downwind of the fallout? Why did the West at first so grossly overestimate the casualties—as a result of the closed nature of Soviet society or out of deliberate malice? And so forth. All of this would have been rich material for a politically passionate novel, and one would have thought that Pohl would have been just the one to write it.

But he didn't. He had extensive cooperation from the Soviet government, which no doubt greatly aided his researches, but may have made him a bit too circumspect out of understandable desire not to be an ingrate. And so what we in fact have in *Chernobyl* is a rather well-done novel of apparatus quite reminiscent of Lester del Rey's *Nerves* (which was written way back when this was still strictly the material of hard science fiction) that blames the whole thing on middle-level petty corruption and technical corner-cutting with no bite at all on a political level.

Instead, we have idealistic engineers and self-servers, heroic workers and slackers, the story of the Chernobyl disaster written as a member of the Soviet Writer's Union might have written it pre-Gorbachev in the confident expectation that it would be publishable.

This does not mean that it is a bad novel, for good novels can and have been written under such constraints, but it does mean that a novel that could and should have been an exciting mix of danger, disaster, political analysis, and character has been reduced to a kind of present-day hard science fiction of apparatus.

And curiously enough, considering Pohl's research and his general knowledgeability about the Soviet Union—or perhaps not so curiously—not only do the characters lack a certain depth of conviction, the settings lack specificity and sensual vividness.

There is a certain general lesson in this, perhaps, which is that politics is as real and vivid and important a part of human life as love, sex, money, food, and art, and when, for whatever reason, a writer blands out the politics of a story

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that cries out for passionate political specificity, he is putting himself in danger of denaturing the other elements of the story, too. Which may be what vitiates the general level of vividness of *Chernobyl* and why officially-approved pre-Gorbachev Soviet fiction has produced so few masterpieces, and, who knows, why the American science fiction of the Reagan era, though unprecedentedly successful on a commercial level, seems to many to have lost a piece of its soul.

Take the political issue most central to American science fiction and closest to its communal heart, the American manned space program. Pre-*Apollo,* pre-*Sputnik,* the American manned space program, *any* manned space program, existed *only* as science fiction. Manned spaceflight was a political issue in the sense that it would take political action to bring it about, but it was a *hot* political issue only within the science fiction community, and most of the science fiction centered on it was passionately engaged in its advocacy.

The positive archetype for this kind of science fiction was, of course, Robert A. Heinlein's *The Man Who Sold the Moon,* and never mind that it was dead wrong as prediction, for it proves that politically engaged advocacy fiction *can* succeed literarily. Delos D. Harriman's long campaign to develop space travel through American private enterprise is a good story, and his death on the Moon as an old man at the end of his dream is genuinely moving. Heinlein's passionate political conviction is conveyed through the passionate political conviction of the character he created, which is what saves *The Man Who Sold the Moon* from degenerating into bloodless propaganda.

The negative archetype for this kind of space fiction was, ironically enough, the film *Destination Moon,* partially adapted from *The Man Who Sold the Moon* by Heinlein himself. Here Delos D. Harriman and his passionate convictions are gone, and what we have is indeed bloodless propaganda, the nuts and bolts story of the first rocket to the Moon, replete with intrepid astronauts, the comic relief kid from Brooklyn, meteor swarms in cislunar space, a technical problem as the complication, and a noble self-sacrifice as the resolution.

Here we have almost a laboratory demonstration of what depoliticization can do to a story. *The Man Who Sold the Moon* was passionately engaged politically and succeeded admirably both as political advocacy and emotionally moving fiction, and is still readable even though history came out quite differently; *Destination Moon,* the politically denatured propaganda version, is as emotionally flat as last week's tortillas and quite unwatchable today.

Unfortunately most of the science fiction in this subgenre followed the line of *Destination Moon* rather than its more full-blooded inspiration, and Project Apollo

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reinforced the notion that science fiction could and should play a didactic and propagandistic role in inspiring the further expansion of humanity into space, rather than concentrating on the literary exploration of the issues involved.

Which was why such outrage was expressed when *Beyond Apollo* won the John W. Campbell, Jr., award as best novel, for it challenged the unstated assumptions at the very core of this subgenre. And which was why, once the Moon was reached, a great deal of L-5 advocacy fiction appeared, and, after that, fiction advocating the Strategic Defense Initiative as the high road into space.

And then came the *Challenger* disaster, and NASA's reaction to it, and the age of innocence for the space community and for this subgenre of science fiction ended. This material was quite literally repoliticized with a bang.

Or anyway up to a point. No one that I know of has published a post-*Challenger* novel thematically committed to Malzberg's notion that human beings are psychologically unfit for space travel, no American novel has opined that space exploration would be better left to the Soviets or the United Nations, but NASA is no longer regarded as a monolithic organization wearing the inevitable white hats. Political themes, political ambiguity, have entered even the space advocacy subgenre, which promises to enhance the literary virtues of this stuff in the process of lending sophistication to its depiction of the short to medium term exploration of space.

There has for some time been a thin stream of more politically sophisticated space advocacy fiction. Gregory Benford has occasionally mined this vein, as has Jerry Pournelle, and Ben Bova's *Kinsman* series dealt with politically sophisticated people engaging in subtle internal NASA politics, which, however, mostly involved career questions.

But now, post-*Challenger*, writers like, for example, Paul Preuss, are coming into their thematic own. There are many similarities between Preuss and Ben Bova, though Bova has been around longer and written much more. Both have technical backgrounds, both have dealt cogently with the internal micropolitics of doing science and technology, both would seem to be passionate space advocates, though Bova has long been a space community apparatchnik of some importance and Preuss has not.

Starfire, Preuss' recent novel, might conceivably have been written by Bova, though I doubt either of them would have written such a book before the *Challenger* disaster and the resultant revisionary re-examination of NASA.

Starfire is the story of a space mission, the flight of a new experimental ship to an asteroid passing close to the sun, but this realistic near future space adventure, with its stirring space advocacy denoue-

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ment, occupies only about half the novel's pages. The first half of the novel is centered on the personal, NASA, military, and macro politics behind the development and construction of the *Starfire*, the selection of the mission profile, and the composition of the crew, all of which are interrelated along lines of political maneuvering, personal ambitions, neurotic needs, and even sexual affairs.

Travis, the main protagonist, is a career astronaut like Bova's Kinsman. In the process of saving himself from taking too much radiation from a solar flare by re-entering the Earth's atmosphere in an untested escape pod more or less against NASA's orders, he has both become a media hero and placed himself on the agency's internal shitlist. Unlike Kinsman, Travis struggles with his own neurotic needs as he machinates to return to space, and unlike Kinsman, his family has fairly heavy political connections.

He manages to get on the *Starfire* by manipulating NASA through the media, by having his family pull political strings behind the scenes, because he is a qualified asteroid expert, and because the captain of the crew is having an illicit affair with the man whom he is going to have to bump.

In *Starfire*, Paul Preuss has brought the space advocacy novel to sophisticated maturity. The passion for the manned exploration of space is there, the nuts and bolts are convincing, and the second half of the novel is pretty stirring hard science space adventure stuff with a heroic self-sacrifice at the climax. But there is more to *Starfire* than that. *Starfire* is a real novel, for Paul Preuss is a fully-rounded novelist in the process of coming into his own.

He has all the tools of the hard science fiction writer, like Bova and Benford. Unlike his earlier novel, *Broken Symmetries*, where all the geographical description of Hawaii seemed a bit forced—a science fiction writer self-consciously trying to be more "mainstream"—*Starfire* shows a real feel for the land, a successful integrating of landscape description with the psyches of the characters to whom the land in question has deep meaning. And Preuss' characters are indeed realistically rendered. Their personal lives, neurotic needs, career ambitions, and yes, idealistic psychic goals, are as much or more determinative of the plot than the public goals of official reality or the scientific goals of pure knowledge.

And that too is political science fiction of a certain kind, not the politics of candidates and issues, what the French call "politique politicien," but the politics of the interface between the individual and the body politic, between deep personal needs and public behavior, between genuine idealism and self-interested careerism, between the exploration of space and the personal drives of the explorers.

Paul Preuss is not writing polit-

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ical science fiction here in the sense that Lucius Shepard is in *Life During Wartime* or that Kim Stanley Robinson is in *The Gold Coast* and *The Wild Shore*, but *Starfire* would not be the complete and honest novel it is without Preuss' sophisticated, knowing, but not really cynical rendering of the relationships between the political and psychological realities. *Starfire* may not exactly be a political novel, but it is not apolitical either. Like most space advocacy fiction, the ultimate goals may remain unexamined political assumptions, but the politics of the actual situations are dealt with analytically and in psychologically realistic detail.

Ken Grimwood's *Replay* is not really a political novel either, in the sense that political issues are not really central, but even more so than *Starfire*, albeit in an entirely different manner, it is a novel that could not succeed anywhere near as well as it does, indeed might not be able to succeed at all, if the political consensus reality of the Reagan era were simply accepted as an unexamined given.

How could it? *Replay* is the story of Jeff Winston, who dies in 1988, and then finds himself awake and aware with all his memories of the future in his college student body back in 1963. He makes a killing on the Kentucky Derby, becomes a fabulously successful gambler, an enormously wealthy investor, lives a whole other life. And dies again in a somewhat alternate 1988. And finds himself replaying his life from the 1960s to 1988 all over again. And again and again and again.

At first, which is to say the first few lifetimes, he thinks he is the only repeater, but then he finally meets another, Pamela, and they go through more lifetimes together, apart, together again. The replays are precessing in a complicated manner, getting shorter and shorter, but the point is that it is the same years between 1963 and 1988 or portions thereof that are being relived over and over again, and with the layered memories of all the previous replays remaining in the minds of Jeff and Pamela.

This is primarily a psychological and metaphysical novel and a wonderful one indeed, reminiscent of both Alfred Bester's sardonic novelette on a similar theme, *5,217,009*, and Philip K. Dick at the top of his form. Grimwood writes with great power, catholic knowledge of all sorts of things, and enormous worldly sophistication. The basic notion of *Replay* is hardly new, but what Grimwood dares to do with it certainly is.

Which is to give us the growth of his central viewpoint character from youth to maturity, not once, not twice, but a multiplicity of times, and not exactly as a series of alternate lifelines, but as a succession of lifelines piling up upon each other. Jeff Winston grows, matures, makes mistakes, tries to rectify them, from one lifetime to the next; in a sense this is

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a parable of the Hindu transmigration of souls through reincarnation towards maturity into nirvanic consciousness, but with two hugely important differences.

Here the souls retain full awareness of previous lifetimes of loves lost and found, of marriages and children who were, and in another sense never came into being, of lives spent accumulating wealth, of lives spent in hedonic dissipation, of lives spent trying to change the world and succeeding, of lives spent trying to change the world and creating disaster, of, if you will, lifetimes of good karma and lifetimes of bad.

And rather than being reincarnated as immortals down through the ages, Jeff and Pamela live alternate versions—sometimes subtly different, sometimes drastically changed by their actions—of *the same historical period.*

And that is the period roughly bracketed by the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the end of the Reagan Administration.

Jeff Winston lives through this period of transformational history over and over again as different avatars, gaining new viewpoints and insights with each replay, and so, when he finally meets her, does Pamela, and the two of them together. Moreover, he starts as an ordinary man and a personal failure the first time around and evolves, if somewhat unsteadily, upwards into more knowledge and more sophisticated consciousness.

As I've said, this is not centrally a political novel, but given the structure, and given the nature of the historical period that Winston, the reader, and Grimwood go through over and over again from so many different perspectives, it is hard to see how such a novel could remain politically disengaged.

Politics move to the front and center only once in the novel towards the end of the book, which is to say Jeff and Pamela end up being political movers and shapers in only one replay, and there it is a disaster.

In their obsession to find out why this is happening to them and in their lonely passion to seek out other repeaters, they go public with their amazing predictions, and are seized and sequestered by the American government as the ultimate secret weapon. Some of the disasters of our own history are thereby averted by the political and military use of their knowledge by the American government in the pursuit of its own ends, but in the pursuit of its own ends, it ends up creating worse messes, and finally a world in which the United States has become a military industrial fascist dictatorship on the brink of bringing on a nuclear war when Winston dies out of it in its 1988.

This is the only section where Grimwood's political passion shows through, but in retrospect, it illumines part of what he has been about in *Replay* all along. In a sense, he has been giving us a pe-

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culiarly rounded vision of what happened to the world, and primarily to America, between the early 1960s and the late 1980s, for Jeff Winston's lives are centered on a different aspect each time around —sex, family, love, drugs, art, economics, and towards the end, politics. So that the novel in the end becomes a meditation upon the proper balance, or lack of it, among these vital aspects of one man's multiple lives, and by extension, in the singular lives of us all.

In *Replay*, politics are not central, at least in their partisan specifics, but they are not at all unexamined either, and all assumptions can be challenged. In a very real sense, this is a science fiction novel about history—both a specific historical period and history itself as it interfaces with those who make it and those whose lives are molded by it.

What makes it such a fine novel on a literary level is that all this is really the backdrop for several love stories and for the damnedest kind of spiritual and metaphysical bildung roman, rather than a political screed or a metaphysical mind-game. Which also makes *Replay* an excellent example of how an essentially psychological and metaphysical science fiction novel can, and indeed perhaps must, incorporate a political dimension to succeed as literary art.

Which is certainly *not* to say that forthrightly political science fiction in which the politics *are* thematically central and the author *is* more or less openly and passionately engaged with them cannot also succeed as literary art. A prime example is *Life During Wartime* by Lucius Shepard, a fine book, but a flawed one, which is at its strongest when Shepard is fearless about the politics, and at its weakest when he seems to nervously back away from them.

Life During Wartime is the story of a future war in Central America which has seamlessly evolved out of past and present events and policies, or so at least for the first half of the book it seems. This is Central America as Viet Nam and the whole thing is alas all too credible as Shepard portrays it, perhaps even inevitable. The present situation of American client troops fighting insurgent leftist guerrillas in El Salvador and American proxy rightist guerrillas fighting a leftist government in Nicaragua has degenerated to the point where the Central American war has generalized and American troops are in there fighting Cubans.

Shepard, who has spent a lot of time in Central America, has written a lot of fine short fiction set there; he not only knows the territory and the people, but it is quite clear that he loves them, and is outraged about what America is doing to them, now, and in his future projection of a larger and even more squalid war with direct American military involvement.

Given these passions, Shepard has been wise enough to tell his story through the character of Min-

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golla, a more or less ordinary American grunt, at least at first, who spends much of his time behind the lines, and who himself has no grand overview of the war or its politics. The novel is exactly what it says it is, the story of Mingolla's life during wartime rather than the story of the war itself. Thus, even though Shepard's political passions shine through bright and clear, there is no preaching, no speechifying, no real strategic overview or naked political message. Shepard makes his political points simply by describing what the war does to Mingolla, to other Americans, and to key Central American characters. "Show, don't tell," and Shepard does it admirably.

Through about the first half of the book, that is, as Mingolla first functions as an ordinary grunt, is put into a special training program, and then sent into the field as a kind of psychic agent. For while *Life During Wartime* is Central America as Viet Nam, it is also science fiction, and this time around, the American military regards drugs not as part of the problem but as part of the solution.

There is a whole pharmacopea of military drugs in use by the Americans here, including a standard issue berserker drug for combat, and the stuff they feed Mingolla, which gives him strange sorts of psychic powers. Mingolla, more or less still a cynically loyal American, is dispatched after a guerrilla leader called Debora, with whom, it turns out, he had once had a brief involvement, and you can sort of guess what starts to happen.

Up to a point, that is. As loyalties and personal desires blur together, the personal begins to become paramount, and Mingolla eventually goes AWOL, and along with Debora and others, gets involved in a long zig-zagging military vision-quest across the jungle warscape towards supposedly neutral Panama and apolitical safety.

All this is wonderfully written on every level. Drug states, combat, magic realistic landscape, strange psychedelic flash-forwards to a weirdly altered future America, love story, all beautifully integrated into an ever-deepening voyage into the psychic heartland of the war and the realities behind it, as Panama becomes a kind of literal and symbolic ultima thule, the goal of the journey, and also the venue where the final reality will be revealed.

Alas, the final reality is a cop-out. Shepard does a cynical, wise, and passionate job of using Mingolla's evolution from ordinary grunt to AWOL psychic defector to a kind of Castenadan Perfect Warrior to take us from what begins as a gritty transmogrification of Viet Nam into Central America into a kind of American magic realism which takes us deeper and deeper into the psychic and cultural substructure of the political and military level of the combat between two world views.

But the core reality that is re-

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vealed in Panama is that what the war and much more is *really* about is a generations-long vendetta between two Latin American families, the Madradonas and the Sotomayors, who have long used drugs to enhance their psychic powers. In retrospect, it is revealed that much of what has happened to Mingolla, the roots of the war itself, and indeed big slices of world politics, are really just pawns in a crazed and petty-minded family feud.

In a sense, by building up Panama as a symbol for opting out of the war, Shepard has been warning us all along, for what happens in Panama is that Shepard opts out of the real-world politics he seems to have cared so passionately about in favor of a forced apolitical denouement. Shepard is a good enough writer to make this work on a plot and character level, but thematically it is a non-sequitur.

What happened here? Why did a writer as good as Lucius Shepard write about two thirds of a brilliant politically engaged novel and then severely vitiate the work by mealy-mouthing an apolitical ending?

The book reads as if he may have gotten rather nervous about his political vector, as if his explorations were leading into dangerous territory, as if he, or his publisher, had at some point begun to worry whether there might not be distribution problems with a book that might be perceived as anti-American.

But this perhaps goes too far in the direction of a critical mind-reading act, and indeed if there were such pressures on *Life During Wartime*, then how did Kim Stanley Robinson manage to get away with something like *The Gold Coast*?

The Gold Coast is just about the most specifically political radically critical science fiction novel about near future America since . . . well, since my own *Bug Jack Barron* back in 1969, and to see such a novel published again after all these years, and by a writer who never wrote anything like this before, is quite a blast of fresh air, quite a hit of the good old Acapulco Gold.

The Gold Coast really is an amazing novel. Robinson, who has never shown a taste for the hard stuff before, writes about future military hardware with a surety and conviction that Pournelle and Bova would envy, and he deals with the down and dirty of defense procurement politics with the disgusted passion of a thoroughly disillusioned insider. And he portrays the world of Orange County drug-dealing with the authenticity and tender loving care of a Philip K. Dick, and then some. And gives us a history of Orange County that imbues that symbolic heartland of American sleaze with a sympathetic and wounded soul. And throws his previous novel, *The Wild Shore*, into an entirely new perspective.

The Wild Shore is set in a future Orange County in which America

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has been decimated by the detonation of thousands of neutron bombs, smuggled in from god-knows-where, and has been reduced to small scattered villages forbidden high technology by the rest of the world, which is determined that American might shall never rise again. It is a rather sad and claustrophobic novel in which the hero never even gains real knowledge of the wider world, and which leaves most readers sadly pining for lost American greatness.

The Gold Coast gives us an alternate twenty-first century in which America has never fallen. It is one in which we are involved in endless imperialistic wars in the Third World, behind the shield of a partially completed Strategic Defense system—procurement of the endless layered systems for which dominates the booming Orange County economy.

Dennis McPherson is an aerospace engineer whose career survival is drawn deeper and deeper into this loathsome netherland of defense industry politics by his boss Stuart Lemon, a politics which now dominates Washington as the Pentagon dominates the civilian government. His son Jim, a would-be-poet and drifting intellectual odd-jobber, orbits around his long-time buddy, Sandy, a medium-level designer drug creator and dealer. Along with other old buddies, Tashi and Abe, they form a kind of Orange County buddy-story at the other pole of the novel, a story centered on drug-dealing and its shadowy connections with shadowy anti-defense industry terrorists.

Yes, *The Gold Coast* centers on the defense industry and drug dealing, the twin hearts of Orange County spirit and commerce, and Robinson not only renders both worlds with utter conviction, he draws the political, economic, and cultural equation between them, making it clear that the major difference is that there is much more honor among drug dealers than arms merchants.

This is the high probability future, Robinson seems to be saying, this is where we are going without the improbable re-ruralization of *The Wild Shore*, and in retrospect, *The Gold Coast* makes the Orange County of that first novel seem a good deal less unattractive.

The Orange County of *The Gold Coast*, a world of hillsides covered with "condomundos," of endless sleazy malls and apartment complexes, of squalid slums beneath the shadows of enormous freeway interchange complexes, of an economy dependent on a corrupt defense industry and the continuation of all the dirty little wars in the Third World, makes the bucolic version seem not so bad, especially given the way Robinson intercuts little snippets of Orange County history as written by Jim, with the destruction of the orange groves that gave it its name as the central metaphor, and with the destruction of the former "American Mediterranean" Eden really getting under way with the first boom of

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the Orange County military aerospace industry during World War II.

Was the coventry into which America was thrown in *The Wild Shore* perhaps justified? Given the America of *The Gold Coast* as the alternative, was it not only better for the world, but in a way for America, too? Certainly it was for the land and its natural spirit, which, paradoxically enough, Robinson conveys more fully and feelingly in *The Gold Coast* than in *The Wild Shore.*

Yet nothing is black and white here. Robinson is a native of Orange County, and he seems to find something in it to love in both versions, warts and all. The beaches are still there and the surf to ride, and there are still a few wooded canyons around the basin, and wild mountains beyond. And while Jim and his friends are in a sense trapped in their adolescent personas by this psychic landscape, endlessly driving around the freeways and malls even now, and turning a brief jaunt to Europe into mostly more of the same, they are basically good people.

Sandy, the drug designer and dealer, is a man of honor with one of the few really strong relationships in the novel with his "ally" Angela. Abe is part of a freeway rescue team who agonizes over what he experiences and has real caring for his partner Xavier. Tashi is a zen surfer type accepting a kind of poverty to opt out of the system. Jim grows towards real maturity. His father Dennis is a real engineer, out of place in the politics of the defense industry, and dedicated to the hardware itself. Even his nasty boss Stuart Lemon has his higher qualities.

Amazingly enough, Robinson even manages a truthful and balanced vision of the drugs that Sandy is making and dealing. Yes, people can and do get messed up on them, and yes, some of the people in the dope business are less than scrupulous. But these designer drugs are not heroin or crack, they are created to induce given positive psychic states by a caring artist, and more often than not they enhance the moment, save people from despair, get them through, though of course mis-timed use or overuse can have unfortunate consequences. And on balance, the people of the drug culture that exists around them are more caring, more honest, more idealistic, more sympathetic, than the people mainlining Pentagon money.

When was the last time you read a science fiction novel that diverged *that* far from the political consensus reality of the Reagan era? Here Robinson bites the bullet of the roots and consequences of American economic militarism in a way that Shepard didn't quite dare in *Life During Wartime* and also dares to re-examine the whole question of drugs in American life in the bargain. And comes to conclusions deeper and truer than anything emanating from Ronald and Nancy Reagan, or for that mat-

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ter Jesse Jackson, conclusions quite at variance with the American consensus on what is at the same time the most vehement issue in American politics and the most depoliticized.

In an interview, Kim Stanley Robinson has said that *The Wild Shore* and *The Gold Coast* form two parts of an Orange County trilogy, the third novel of which will be a utopia. It will be interesting to see if he will be able to bring such a thing off without lapsing into didacticism or boredom.

Who knows, Robinson may actually be able to pull it off. Certainly *The Gold Coast* is a quantum leap forward for Kim Stanley Robinson—a well-rounded, caring, feeling, science fiction novel, with real characters, superb technological and popular cultural extrapolation, a deep feeling for a piece of the American landscape, and rarest of all these days, a politically engaged science fiction novel courageously far outside the depoliticized consensus.

Could it be one small answer blowing in the wind? Could the times be at last a-changing? ●

NEXT ISSUE

Our August issue features two of the strongest stories you're likely to see this year. First, multiple Hugo-and Nebula-winner **Orson Scott Card** takes us back to his vividly realized "Mormon Sea" future, the setting for such well-known stories as "America," "Salvage," and "The Fringe," for his huge new novella "Pageant Wagon," the saga of a roving theater troupe in a savage post-holocaust world, and also the story of a nation struggling to put itself back together after disaster and dissolution, all as seen through the eyes of one lonely and restless young man; the longest single story we've ever published, almost a novel in itself, this is one you're not going to want to miss. From post-holocaust America, Nebula-and World Fantasy Award-winner **Lucius Shepard** then takes us to present-day Guatemala for one of the hardest-hitting and most controversial stories we've ever published, a vivid, chilling, and powerful look at the true nature of evil, in "Surrender."

ALSO IN AUGUST: **Charles Sheffield** takes us aloft to an eerie and long-abandoned orbital space station, for a frightening, high-tech "Nightmare of the Classical Mind"; **Isaac Asimov** returns with the latest George and Azazel story, a tasty toast drunk "To Your Health"; new writers **Lee Wallingford** and **Carol Deppe** make their *IAsfm* debut with the taut story of a scientist in a deadly race against time and terrorism to unlock a secret encoded in DNA itself, in "Special Delivery"; **John M. Ford** returns with a biting satire of the works of a certain Very Well Known Writer, in the hilarious "The Hemstitch Notebooks"; and new writer **M.F. McHugh** makes a brilliant *IAsfm* debut with a bittersweet and moving tale of a young man's dangerous coming-of-age on a twenty-first century Arctic expedition, in "Baffin Island." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our August issue on sale on your newsstands on June 27, 1989.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

If you got this issue on the newsstand, you missed these Memorial Day con(vention)s (subscribe now!). Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. The hot line is (703) 823-3117. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Early evening's usually a good time to call cons (most are home phones; be polite). When writing cons, enclose an SASE. Look for me at cons with a Filthy Pierre badge and music keyboard.

MAY, 1989

19-21—**Oasis.** For info, write: **3206 Caulfield, Apopka FL 32703.** Or call: **(407) 725-2383** (10 am to 10 pm, not collect). Con will be held in: Orlando FL (if city omitted, same as in address), at the Howard Johnson's. Guests will include: M. Resnick, I. Nielsen, A. Norton, R. Adams, Lee Hoffman.

19-22—**KeyCon.** Delta Hotel, Winnipeg MB. Lois McM. Bujold, Harry Turtledove, Robt. J. Pasternak.

19-21—**SFeraKon, Ivanicgradska 41a, 41000 Zagreb, Yugoslavia.** Long-running Eastern-European con.

25-28—**SilCon, c/o Silesian SF Club, skr. poczt. 502, Katowice 40-956, Poland.** An annual affair.

26-28—**DisClave.** Howard Johnson's, New Carollton MD (near Washington). L. Shepard, J. K. Potter.

26-28—**InterDimensions. (812) 852-4542.** Omni Netherland, Cincinnati OH. T. Zahn. Gaming/media SF.

26-28—**VCon. (604) 271-5951 or 738-8356.** Gage Center, UBC, Vancouver BC. Robinsons, R. Sheckley.

26-28—**ArtCon. (817) 572-5547.** Hyatt DFW, Dallas/Ft. Worth TX. G. Martin, Freas, Cherry, Asprin.

26-29—**CostumeCon.** Desmond-Americana Hotel, Albany NY. Annual SF/fantasy/historic costuming con.

26-29—**ConQuest, Box 36212, Kansas City MO 64111. (816) 524-4852.** No more info at press time.

26-29—**MediaWestCon. (517) 372-0738.** Hilton Inn, Lansing MI. Star Trek/media SF. Usual sellout.

26-29—**MexiCon.** Albany Hotel, Nottingham UK. An occasional British con; strong fannish flavor.

26-29—**Space Development Con. (312) 373-0349.** Hyatt O'Hare, Chicago IL. Scientific conference.

26-29—**BayCon. (408) 272-9477.** Red Lion, San Jose CA. O. S. Card. Big Bay-area con (3000 or so).

JUNE, 1989

2-4—**ArtCon, 252 S. Alder, Philadelphia PA 19107.** New art con, not connected with Texas con above.

AUGUST, 1989

31-Sep. 4—**Noreascon 3, Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** WorldCon in Boston. $80 to 7/15.

AUGUST, 1990

23-27—**ConFiction, c/o Box 1252, BGS, New York NY 10274.** Hague, Holland. WorldCon. $70 in 1989.

30-Sep. 3—**ConDiego, Box 15771, San Diego CA 92115.** North American SF Con. $55 to June 30 '89.

AUGUST, 1991

29-Sep. 2—**ChiCon V, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690.** WorldCon. H. Clement, R. Powers. $75 in '89.

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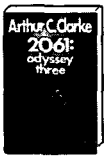

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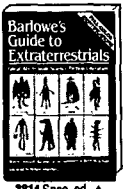

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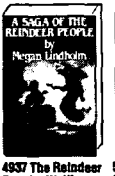

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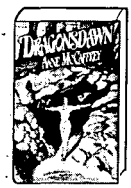

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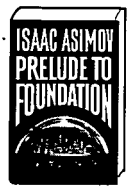

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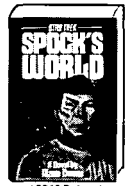

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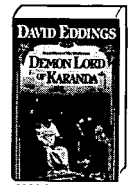

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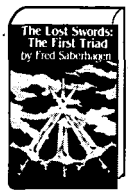

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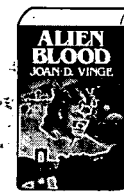

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